

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

MARION BARWELL



NEW AGE PUBLISHERS PRIVATE LIMITED.

NEW AGE PUBLISHERS PRIVATE LTD.

22, Canning Street, Calcutta-1
12, Bankim Chatterjee Street, Calcutta-12
Gole Market, New Delhi-1

Marion Barwell 1960

First published 1960

PRINTED IN INDIA

t Modern India Press, 7, Wellington Square, Calcutta-13, and published
v J. N. Sinha Roy, New Age Publishers Private Ltd., Calcutta-1.

For

MANI SANKAR MUKHERJI

who has written KATA AJANARE (So Many Unknown)

*The hitherto unpublished letters from
Sarojini Naidu are reproduced by the
kind permission of Srimati Padmaja Naidu,
Governor of West Bengal.*

PART ONE

Eleven years before I was born, my father, being then nineteen and in the sixth form of his English public school, entered for the school poetry prize with a poem entitled quite simply 'India'.

It began :

Before the face of the eterna! East

Our songs, our systems and our histories seem

Frail, hueless, childlike.

Naturally enough, since he proceeded to enlarge on this theme for close on three hundred lines in the course of which he made a number of disparaging comments on Anglo-Saxon rule, the poem was not considered worthy of the prize. A copy of it however was sent by my father's mother to Professor Max Muller, who was a family friend, and he wrote back :

'Your son's poem is certainly full of promise and more than promise. I feel sure that he would find many things in the ancient literature of India to interest and inspire him.'

Those were the days when the intellectual interest of Europe in things Indian was at its height, but my father, though the son of a man amongst whose studies was that of Sanskrit, was not scholarly in the strictest sense of the term and he would have been far more attracted by the living people of the land than by their ancient literature. Unfortunately, just as he failed to

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

win the prize with his poem, so did he never succeed in getting to India. He was nevertheless to remain all his life romantically in love with it.

Though my father never managed to get to India, most of his nearest relations did, a fact which was a source of great bitterness to him. There was the head of the family, an Indian Army officer, who had been Inspector of Fortifications and had retired with the rank of Major-General. He was unusually small of stature for an Englishman and perhaps to make up for his lack of inches he had cultivated a way of speaking that contained all the most intimidating traditions of the parade ground. I was still young when he died and all I can remember of him or his conversation, is hearing him say, and it seems to me that I heard it more than once : *'Ever — been — to — Quetta?'* He must have known we had never been to Quetta, or anywhere else in India, so that this was doubtless in the nature of a stock phrase with a man whose mind was perhaps weakening through old age, but my father was duly incensed.

There were other soldiers, the most distinguished of whom was killed in the First World War at Kut : there were also civil servants, and lawyers and amongst these last was an uncle by marriage of my father's whom he often described to me as having been the most terrifying human being he had ever encountered. This uncle, who would seem to have been a spiritual brother to Mr. Barrett of Wimpole Street, had been married in Calcutta to my father's eldest aunt in the year eighteen-

thirty-two and all their ten sons and daughters had been born in that city at one of the houses in Old Post Office Street. He was really one of the last of the true nabobs, for of him it was said that he had left India with the largest fortune ever made up to that time at the Calcutta Bar. This may or may not have been true, but certain it is that he subsequently bought two very fine houses in England, an Elizabethan manor in Essex and a Victorian mansion in London and besides employing a butler who was almost as terrifying as he was, had taken back with him when he retired what was known in the family as a 'curry cook'. His eldest daughter, who lived to be nearly a hundred, told me when she was a very old lady how, whenever one of her brothers had been summoned to appear before their father to receive admonition for some minor fault, she and her sisters had spent the time till the culprit reappeared on their knees in prayer.

The civil servants struck a pleasanter note and one of them even won my father's regard by contributing a series of articles on various aspects of the ethnographical side of India to one of the more learned periodicals. But all the rest of his relations, whether soldiers, civil servants or lawyers, infuriated my father by their failure to have brought back with them any hint of what he considered the *true* India. He complained especially that they never could be got to speak of the *colours* of the land, nor were matters at all improved when the nicest of them, who had retired with a knighthood from the Commissionership of Peshawar, recounted his

known as a pro-Boer and as he was at all times a Gladstonian liberal, an Irish Home-Ruler.

All this is not to say that he was not as to certain aspects of himself an enthusiastic Englishman. He had taken his degree in constitutional history and he considered the English legal and parliamentary systems to be the best in the world. In the same way, and in spite of the fact that he heartily disliked the out-and-out Englishman, had suffered at his public school from being called by what was then the schoolboys' nickname for everyone of French birth, namely 'Froggy' and was wont to say that two of his uncles were the originals of Dickens's Podsnap and Veneering, he secretly despised all those Europeans who had not had the advantages of an English upbringing and education.

Meanwhile, his thoughts often reverted to his native land. Although he had only been seven years old at the time of the Franco-Prussian War he was always to retain the power to speak the dialect of Strasbourg and he never ceased to grieve over the loss of his family portraits which had gone up in the flames that had destroyed his ancestral home. His great-grandfather had been a *juge d'instruction* during the French Revolution and his likeness, complete with feathered cocked hat and *tricolor* sash, had been amongst those lost. My father was always a little shy of admitting to the political affiliations of this forbear and he often laughed at what he was pretty sure had been the badness of the painting itself, but in his heart of hearts he was prouder of him than of all the rest.

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

Because of his anomalous nationality, my father was never able to go back to Alsace till he was well over military age, for he had been warned by relations on the spot that he was regarded as being liable for military service both by France as a Frenchman born and by Germany as the son of what was known as an *ausländer*.

To what degree any of this was connected with his feeling for India would be hard to say, but when at long last he and my mother and I went on a visit to Alsace, he exclaimed again and again at the resemblances of many of the characteristics of the Alsatian plain to what he believed to be those of the Indian countryside.

There was the climate, almost, if not at times quite, as hot. There were the crops, or some of them, for there were tobacco, hemp and maize. There were the storks. There were the fireflies. There were also, alas, the mosquitoes. There were the milk-white oxen harnessed to all the farm wagons. There were the wild animals, such as the wolf and the wild-boar, both of which had been long since defunct in the British Isles. There was the magnificent and still extant women's dress, not, it was true, very much like that of India, but equally traditional. Above all there was, even as in India, a peasantry and, even as in India, there were the old devoted household and agrarian servants, many of whom belonged to families that had been in the service of the same landowners for many generations.

After leaving Oxford my father had been for some time a free-lance journalist, but in the year before my birth, that is to say in eighteen-ninety-two, he was

appointed librarian of King's College, London, and it was while there that he came more closely into touch with what was to him the *true* India than at any other time in his life, for it was there that he made two henceforth to be dearly-loved Indian friends.

Birendra Lal Bhaduri was, I imagine, a student of law. Sarojini Chattopâdhyây, later to become Sarojini Naidu, was attending a series of lectures which my father was giving on the structure of poetry.

In the light of my father's unvarying outspokenness on all political matters save those of India, it seems to me to be of no small significance that nowhere amongst such of his papers as are still existent, is there a single allusion to either of these friends. He sometimes spoke of them in my hearing, but always in a more or less impersonal way. I know, for instance, that he believed Birendra Lal to have 'got into trouble' with the authorities on political grounds, but I do not know how he came by that knowledge or indeed if it was more than supposition on his part, unless they had corresponded after Birendra Lal went back to Calcutta, and, search as I may amongst my father's literary remains, I have been unable to find any letter either from or about him.

With Sarojini Chattopâdhyây it was a different matter. Though prevented by the conventions of the times from speaking too freely as a still young married man of an even younger, unmarried and no doubt fascinating India lady, he often spoke of the touching way in which she had remained, figuratively-speaking, at

his feet, while the rest of his students had drifted gradually away. Whether this was strictly true, or whether it was an example of the slight persecution complex that had begun to beset my father where the relation of the British public towards poetry was concerned I shall never now be able to judge. for when I myself got to know Sarojini later on I found her apparently unaware that such a situation had in fact ever come about.

Before me as I write are the two letters from her to my father that are all I have been able to find. The first, dated the 19th of December, 1895, and headed 75 Gunterstone Road, West Kensington, runs as follows:

Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for the kind interest you have shown in my little attempts at rhyming. I should feel very proud indeed to have anything I have written published in the King's College Gazette. May I request you to give me permission to send you a few more of my feeble attempts at verse for your criticism? Quite by chance I discovered yesterday that you had published a volume of poetry 'In the Dorian Mood'. I am going to get it as soon as I can, and expect to enjoy the poems extremely.

I am, yours sincerely,
Sarojini Chattopâdhyây

The second, dated the 2nd of November, 1896, was written from Girton College, Cambridge, and runs :

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

Dear Mr. Plarr,

Perhaps you still remember how very kind you were about certain verses I sent you about a year ago? Now, I have been reading your poems of the Dorian Mood and cannot resist the temptation of telling you how much I have enjoyed them. I do not presume to criticise, but only to appreciate, and there are certain things in your book that appeal to me very much, especially the charming little lyrics, such as 'When the Lamp is Quenched', 'Twilight Piece', 'The Veil of Isis', 'Shadows', 'Through the Wood' and 'The Haunting Dream'. The last one especially has an exquisite and delicate music

'O for the joy that might have been,
O for the joy that shall not be,

I think Ernest Dowson might well have added to

'Eugenio's learning and Eugenio's wit'
Eugenio's gift of song, strong and clear—

I have gone on writing and I hope improving, since the time when I wrote 'Rohini' and the Sonnets. I have, as you advised, kept more or less to Eastern subjects.

Let me again repeat how much pleasure I have had in reading your poems, and let me echo the words of Richard le Gallienne—was it not he who said them?—that 'The Dorian Mood must make us some more music.'

Believe me, yours sincerely,
Sarojini Chattopâdhyây

Sarojini must have gone back to India between

then and the end of the century, but whether my parents saw her off, or even whether they were on such terms with her as would have made that a natural gesture on their part, I again do not know. Certain it is, however, that she made a great and lasting impression on my mother, for the name *Sarojini Chattopâdhyây* as spoken by her in caressing tones is woven into my memories of my early years like an ever-recurring phrase of music.

In the year 1897, my father left King's College and became librarian of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. From then on, in that almost wholly scientific atmosphere, his intelligence was more often to be at war with his emotions than heretofore. He had always been hard put to it when he had found himself on both sides of a historical controversy at once, as for instance in the case of the wars of the late eighteenth century in Brittany and la Vendee, the Revolutionary leaders of which he admired extremely on the one hand and the Chouans, whom he adored, on the other ; but towards the Nationalist movement in India he can never have been in any doubt. If proof were wanting that this was so, his views on the cult of Rudyard Kipling were evidence enough. He was ever a good hater, but Kipling was a special object of his detestation and the word *Empire* as applied to Great Britain and her dependencies was as the reddest of red rags to the most savage of bulls. I remember hearing him say that

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

the day on which Queen Victoria had been proclaimed Empress of India had sounded the death-knell of all that poor old England stood for! But even here he was divided between Kipling the jingo and war-monger and Kipling the writer, for of some of that author's imaginative writing my father thought very highly indeed.

The coronation of Edward the Seventh in the August of nineteen-hundred-and-two brought from my father a characteristic copy of verses. I quote those of his stanzas that set forth as plainly as anything he ever wrote his purely romantic attitude to life in general and to India in particular. They were headed, 'To a Brahmin, said to be among the Indian Troops encamped at Hampton Court' and were dedicated, as might have been expected, to Birendra Lal Bhaduri.

What brings thee over the dim sundering sea
To be a cynosure for London's eyes?
What draws thee, Brahmin, down to the degree
Of peoples scarce as wise?

Is it our polity that spurs thee forth?
Thy race has seen a thousand kingdoms wane.
Oh, thou—thou holdest nought of any worth
Save Wisdom hoar as Pain!

Is it our tongue, O child of Vedas old,
Our uninflected dialect, far-strayed
From Sanscrit's ever-during type and mould
That lures thee unafraid?

What canst thou learn from us? How wheels best fly?
How lucre best is got? To teach were hard!
If thy stone cartwheels break, thou letst them lie:—
Gold thou dost disregard

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

Save as some splendid amulet to deck
Thy dusky shoulders, or to embrace the slim
Curves of an unseen girl-bride's unpraised neck
In gynaeceums dim!

What hast thou found here save a score of shames—
Daily the stunted Cockneys all astare,
Hysteric transports and illucid aims,
A murk and pallid air?

Lovely as tulips, tall as cypress trees,
The glorious Sikhs are pacing on the grass.
Are there in Aryan Europe men like these
That momentary pass?

Have we such hues? Can the French Gerôme paint
The glows that in these beetling turbans shine?
The graces of the Georgian age grow faint
Beside this grace divine!

The Georgian Age! We are at Hampton Court.
Strange that we camp you here, who might have set
Your wide pavilions, in illiterate sport,
Where factories reek and sweat!

Kinsman—for thou and I are Aryan both—
Pundit—my fathers died for learning too—
I hail thee at this last, but yet am loth
To find thee thus in view!

A little hard, I cannot but think, on the Londoner.
Having been born within sound (always supposing the
wind to be coming roughly from the direction of the
north-west) of Bow Bells, I count myself one of the
despised Cockneys, but my father never ceased to profess
something akin to hatred for the city in which he earned
his bread.

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

This year of nineteen-hundred-and-two was to prove a specially fecund one for my father on the subject of India. He was in the habit of going for long walks either alone or with one or other of his closest friends in the countryside round about London and on one of these, on what happened to be the anniversary of the death of Lord Clive, he came to Claremont where that death had taken place. As a result of this visit he wrote, somewhat in the manner of an eighteenth-century broadsheet :

The leaves have fallen on the hill:
The leaves have dropped upon the lake,
Swift-eddying downward, where they still
A vagrant floating pattern make.

Gold coinage out of Nature's mint,
They scatter on the waters black.
Ah, did he ever take their hint
And from the gold of man draw back,

He who walked here long years ago,
The tyrant broken in his part,
An opiate sorrowing through his woe
And grappling numbly in his heart?

Thick rose the walls of Claremont there:
The Surrey clowns wide-gaping said:
"Yon stones that might exclude cold air,
Keep out the fiend and the brown dead!"

Clive, haunted, fled here from the town:
Disgraced, he built yon splendid home,
But still the Hindoo faces brown
Of men long dead o'er alien foam,

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

Clustered about him, peeped at door,
Waited wherever he would pass:
In sev'nteen hundred and seventy four
He killed himself before his glass;

For at his shoulder still they stood,
And at his toilet thronged behind.
Powder may blot out wrinkles—blood
Through powder purpling, looks unkind!

It was a bright November day:
The leaves had fall'n, but still they swam
In golden tapestry away
Beyond the dovecote, near the dam:

Something went shuddering through the sky:
The rushes on the lake did sough.
'Tis a long century gone by
Death stood where I am standing now.

We have no peasants left, but Clives
On scores of frontiers point our songs,
And work, through many panting lives,
Some good or immemorial wrongs!

Satraps we worship: gold is not
Checked by our parliaments, for we
Ask not—"How earned" so it be got
To dazzle our mind's penury!

Poor opium-sodden Clive, and such
As saw the demon o'er him bent!
Their terrors, his remorse, were much
More godlike than our new content!

My father, who was now close on forty, had reached

a stage when, to all outward seeming, he was beginning to retrogress. The disgust with the conditions of the life of the times which is so evident in the verses I have just quoted would have led one to suppose that he might now have taken Max Muller's advice and turned to the ancient literature of the Hindus. Instead, he went even further back and, plunging headlong into the Nordic mythology, began an immensely long epic in blank verse on the twilight of the Northern gods. He called his poem 'The Tragedy of Asgard' and for the next few years his entire being appeared to be taken up with the doings, if such they can be called of *Tiw*, *Woden*, *Thor* and *Freyer*, who have given their names to the Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of the week of the Baltic peoples.

How often, during this period, his mind turned towards India, it is difficult to assess, for he had ceased altogether to write about it. I do know however that at some time during the twelve years between the coronation of Edward the Seventh and the outbreak of the First World War, he not only read with me 'Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies' by the Abbé Dubois, a fresh edition of which had appeared in eighteen-ninety-seven, but he actually went so far as to consider putting in an application for the librarianship of one of the leading Indian universities. That this application was never forwarded, or if it was successful was never followed up, was I believe due to my mother's fear of the Indian climate, she being particularly susceptible to heat.

Meanwhile, my father's muse had received a certain measure of recognition. The poetry of the 'nineties was undergoing something of a revival and his verse was finding its way into the anthologies. Throughout this time, too, his shorter poems were being printed with considerable regularity in some of the better-class popular magazines. 'The Tragedy of Asgard' was published during the first months of the war, a miscalculation on the part of his publisher that enabled him to accept with equanimity the fact that it fell almost completely flat. At the time of the Armistice, however, he had the felicity of getting his poem 'Strasbourg' accepted by 'The Times', an event that was not the less gratifying by reason of the fact that the last poem before his that had appeared in those august columns had come, ironically enough, from no less a pen than that of Rudyard Kipling!

It was at this time too that Sarojini Naidu once again crossed our paths.

My father was a member of the literary society which met to dine every so often and that was known as the Poets' Club and the now celebrated Indian Nationalist leader and poet was asked to dine and address the members on the subject of poetry with her old *guru*, Victor Plarr, in the Chair.

This was the first time I had consciously seen Sarojini in the flesh: it was also the first time I had heard what could truly be called *oratory*. The audience sat as though tranced. The speaker could have addressed it on any subject under the sun—and she did

in fact say scarcely anything at all about poetry, but a great deal about Indian nationalism—and they would have been equally enraptured. I do not believe any of us could have recalled afterwards exactly what it was that Sarojini had *said*: it was enough that we had *heard* her. I can see her now, swaying back and forth a little with the power that was coming out of her. This was fervour! This was eloquence!

Fearful perhaps of his standing as a Britisher, for my poor father had lived in terror throughout the war years of being mistaken for a German and had in consequence become less inclined to champion any cause that could be regarded as in the slightest degree anti-British, he did not attempt to see more of Sarojini during this stay of hers in London. Thus it was that we were none of us ever to encounter her again until I did so after coming to India.

My father died at the beginning of nineteen-hundred-and-twenty-nine and in the previous summer he and my mother and I paid what was to prove our last visit to Alsace. We began our holiday in the country above Saverne and while we were walking one evening alongside the famous Route de France, a curious little episode took place. *

We shall no doubt have been talking of indifferent things, but quite likely of the fact that we were close to the village of Phalsbourg, the birthplace of that Erckmann who was one of the joint authors of 'L'Ami Fritz', when my father suddenly broke away from us and with a cry of, 'Indians—I believe they are Indians!'

began moving with all the speed of which he was capable towards a small group of people with a two-wheeled cart that was approaching in a westward direction along the otherwise deserted highway.

When my mother and I came up with the little group, which we did in far more leisurely fashion, it was to find my father in the midst of an animated conversation, conducted largely by means of signs, with two dark-skinned men wearing a species of elementary puggaree, who had already succeeded in conveying to him that they were members of a nomadic tribe and that they had indeed come all the way from India, travelling overland with their little cart.

My father was of course an ardent Borrovian and the few Romany words with which he was familiar now came in very usefully. I have seldom seen him so excited. That these should be Gipsies was enough, but that they should be Gipsies *from India*, was almost too much. I am only surprised that he did not celebrate this encounter in the verse that flowed so readily from his pen after any occasion upon which his emotions had been stirred.

It was during this last visit of ours to Alsace that my father was told of an episode which related to our revolutionary forbear and that gave him very great satisfaction. This was that he had connived at the escape of a Catholic priest who seems to have been a friend of his, at the time when the priesthood had been proscribed and all religious observances forbidden and when the penalties for helping anyone in holy orders

to evade the rigours of the revolutionary enactments were of the severest kind.

Although there was a span of twenty-eight years between my father and myself, we shared a godmother. She was a Scotswoman, who, married like my grandmother to an Alsatian *savant*, had paid two visits to the Holy Land from which she had brought back in conveniently-sized bottles enough of the sacred waters of the River Jordan to enable the sign of the cross to be made on our infant brows.

Whether or not it was this specially hallowed introduction to our respective sects, in the case of my father the French Reformé, in mine the Anglican, or because we were rather too freely sprinkled with Jordan water, we were always afterwards to maintain with perfect sincerity and in face of the fact that both these events will have taken place before we were three months old, that we could remember the circumstances of our baptisms! Here, however, except for certain physical characteristics which proclaimed me unmistakably his daughter, all resemblance between us would appear to have ceased.

My father, as has been seen, was essentially a poet, while I, though not going quite so far as my mathematician grandfather, who held that poetry was nothing but prose cut up into lengths, was destined to derive infinitely more satisfaction from music, fiction

and the theatre than from thought or emotion expressed in poetic form.

Then again, despite the fact that I was familiar, like most of my fellow-countrymen and women, with certain aspects of Indian art and life, I never had any conscious leanings towards India until such time as I set foot on her soil. It was always said of me with the tender amusement displayed by its parents towards the sayings of an only child, that one of the earliest words I had been heard to utter was *turban*, which I had rendered somewhat idiosyncratically as *turbotan*. It may be just possible that in spite of being a Bengali, Birendra Lal Bhaduri, whom I shall almost certainly have seen during his visits to our house, will have worn some kind of *puggaree* in order to proclaim his origin; but it is equally likely that I was not attempting to say *turban* at all, but *turbot*, which fish was a special favourite with my father.

Very early in my life, probably on my third birthday, I was presented with a small but absolutely lifelike toy *cow*, covered with real cow-hide and able, when its head was turned from side to side to utter a sound resembling 'moo'. Granted that this creature was no Brahmini bull, but an obvious Herefordshire heifer, I should surely, had I had an innate, or even acquired turning towards things Indian, have treasured this emblem of the Great Ind! But not a bit of it: I greatly preferred a small green china *frog* with one of its front legs missing, and frogs of this kind are recognisably native to Alsace.

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

I was born at Greenwich, but when I was getting on towards four we moved to Kensington and at the gate of that part of Kensington Gardens known as the Broad Walk, there stood in those days an elderly man who bore on his shoulders a kind of cushion made of straw in which were stuck on the ends of sticks a small forest of ingeniously constructed double pentagrams, made of contrasting coloured papers. These will, I suppose, have cost twopence, or even less and were known by the children of Kensington who were often to be seen running with one revolving briskly in the hand, as *windmills*. To us they may have been no more than windmills, but to my father they were scientifically interesting toys which had come all the way by sea from India and so were objects of peculiar affection to him that he viewed with what were to me inscrutable smiles.

It is said that familiarity breeds contempt, but I think it would be at least as true to say that those things which are of everyday use become part of our lives and are therefore apt to pass unnoticed. Thus it is that throughout my youth the various small, but none the less significant details of our daily lives which were connected with India were regarded by me as being an integral part of my native land. There was, for instance, the *rice*, which had to be of a kind called *Patna* and that was eaten both as a pudding, when it was cooked in milk and as an accompaniment to what we fondly believed were *curries*. These last were dependant for their flavour upon Polson's Curry Powder which came in a bottle, were besprinkled with what was appropriately

known as 'dessicated' coconut and had as an accessory a hottish substance, also out of a bottle, called *chutney*. My father, be it noted, liked his curries *hot*. He declared in fact that he could only feel satisfied after eating one, when, as he said, it had been hot enough to cause tears to flow from his eyes. When chidden for what the rest of us felt to be a somewhat decadent taste, he pointed out that the poet Keats was known to have been addicted to red pepper.

Then there was Liberty's famous shop in Regent Street and later on Storey's in High Street, Kensington, in both of which it was possible to buy high-grade Indian textiles and carpets. The materials for both my mother's and my dresses were nearly always bought at Liberty's; our underclothing was made of a superior calico known as *madapollam*; our rooms were shielded from the public gaze by blinds of a perfectly plain kind of Indian muslin that was thin but dense and our beds were covered with Indian hand-printed cotton bedspreads. It was from Liberty's too that we obtained those incense-sticks which were known by us as 'joss-sticks' since we thought of them as being wholly Chinese and that we burned in our rooms for the sake of a scent that was to us as wholly delicious as it was redolent of the 'mysterious' East.

Meanwhile, scattered about our house were various objects that had been brought back as presents by my grandmother's sisters when they had returned to England at last after long and unbroken sojourns in different parts of India. These included half-a-dozen Kashmir shawls, some ivory carvings, a minute set of musical

instruments in a tiny wooden case and a metal paper-weight in the shape of a scorpion.

In my early years the only things which I clearly connected with India were some life-sized models of Indian villagers engaged in their day-to-day tasks which were housed in the Imperial Institute, a place to which I was often taken by my nursemaid of an inclement Sunday afternoon alternatively with the Natural History Museum. It is a very long time since I saw these representations of Indian village life, but I am pretty sure that they will not only have been the work of the incomparable Krishnagar craftsmen and so have been typical of Bengal, but that they will have been specially modelled for the Indian section of the Great Exhibition of eighteen-hundred-and-fifty-one which was held just across the road from the Imperial Institute in Hyde Park.

Before the days of motor transport the moving of house was a formidable undertaking and while we were changing over from Greenwich to Kensington I was sent, together with my nurse, to be with the three unmarried daughters of the late 'Mr. Barrett' of Old Post Office Street who lived in Hampstead and the eldest of whom was the second of my two godmothers.

These three ladies must long ago have forgotten such childhood as, with a father as frightening as theirs, they may be supposed to have enjoyed, with the result that I was treated on this, the first occasion on which I had

left home as something resembling a grown-up person. In pursuance of this attitude of theirs my godmother, who must then have been round about sixty but who looked much older, was so far mindful of her duty as my religious mentor as to send me off with my nurse on our first Sunday there to the eleven o'clock service at the local parish church. She was then in the state of ill-health that was to endure until her death a few years later so that she did not go to church herself on that particular Sunday, but remained awfully in bed in readiness to receive and question the two of us on our return.

I have always regarded the moments during which I stood by the bedside of this terrible old Victorian lady as not only the most alarming of this Hampstead visit, but as some of the most alarming I was ever to know, for she asked us in freezing tones to repeat the text of the sermon which we had just heard. I was not more than three-and-a-half years old at this time and I had not understood one single word that I had heard uttered during this, my first experience of a Christian church service, but I have never ceased to remember that I was ashamed to the very core of my being at my inability to answer intelligently, or indeed at all. I have no idea whether my nurse was able to make a satisfactory reply, but in the light of what presently occurred I rather think not.

It may have been as a reprisal for our failure at the interrogatory regarding the text, for when I got home my nurse reported that after that first Sunday I was

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

sent to eat my breakfast in the kitchen with the servants. In these days in England, since there are no servants to speak of and most people eat at least some of their meals at the kitchen table, little would be thought of this; but in the year eighteen-ninety-seven it was looked upon as being in the nature of a social slight, if not as an intentional insult and it was as the latter that my parents chose to regard it. Ludicrous as it may seem, as a result of this it was to be quite a long time before our two families were again on speaking terms and in the case of my mother I doubt if the wound thus inflicted ever altogether healed.

In accordance with the French way of life that we still to some extent followed, my widowed grandmother made her home in that of her only son. She was then already past seventy, but from the time we moved to Kensington she and I were close companions and I was often to be found with her in her sitting-room which was next door to my nursery at the top of the house, either listening while she read aloud from *The Arabian Nights*, which she expurgated for my benefit as she went along, or receiving religious instruction from her in the form of the Collect and Lessons for the day from the *Book of Common Prayer*.

My father was an agnostic and so did not go to church at all, but his mother who had been born into Methodism at a time when it was a fashionable form of dissent, was a regular church-goer, though she nowadays

spoke of herself as being and indeed was what she called 'broad' church. This meant that she went to church mainly for the sake of the sermon and as one of the most popular preachers of the day was that Canon Wilberforce who was the son of the sponsor of the abolition of slavery she very often attended his church in Westminster. At other times she took part in the mid-morning service at St. Mary Abbot's, Kensington and until the day when my mother was told by an officious neighbour that an old lady in a bonnet and cape and a very young child in Kate Greenaway costume had been seen dodging under the noses of a pair of 'bus horses in the High Street in the most horrifying way, I was allowed to accompany her.

It has always seemed to me a matter for the greatest astonishment that otherwise intelligent people can make the mistake of introducing the young to the highly esoteric side of Christianity which forms its various liturgies at an age when they are still incapable of understanding even the comparatively straightforward teaching of its founder. I can remember nothing whatever of those mid-morning services at our parish church except the overwhelming smartness of the congregation. Everyone was manifestly in his or her very best clothes and the whole church reeked of wealth.

This impression of wealth as being connected with Sunday was in no way lessened when, after the service, my grandmother took me to call on one or other of her old family friends, who were all, without exception, even by the standards of to-day, very rich. Had I been

older I might have enjoyed what was in fact a dip into the Early Victorian age, for at least one of these old ladies had been a West Indian heiress who had had as her marriage portion what was known as a 'plum', that is to say one hundred thousand pounds sterling. Alas that I did not grasp the implications of this and so took as a matter of course the rich Victorian furnishings of the enormous house, the vast canvases by celebrated Royal Academicians and the splendours of the well-kept gardens and greenhouses, into which I was always sent in the company of the butler while the two old ladies had their chat. At this and all the other houses I was taken to on these Sunday mornings refreshments were offered in the form of sherry and biscuits, but I, of course, always drank lemonade or water.

Two of these Sunday morning visits have stayed vividly in my mind for upon one I was made known to the man whom I had been assured was one of the greatest figures of his time in that he had been responsible for the introduction of the modern sanitary system of London, while the other was the first occasion upon which I had to my knowledge seen grown-up people weep.

The great Victorian figure was Sir John Simon, who had been the first Medical Officer of Health to the city of London and to Government. He had also been a very distinguished surgeon and his connection with my father's family was due to his having been a fellow student with one of my father's uncles at St Thomas's Hospital, where they were both in due course to become members of the honorary staff.

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

By the time I saw him the old gentleman was so far gone in years and was so feeble that it is doubtful whether the visit of anyone as young as myself will have made any impression on him. He lay on a sofa and, since he was by this time completely bald he wore on his head a little round black cap which held my childish attention to the exclusion of all else.

The occasion on which I was to have my first introduction to the expression of adult sorrow was on a Sunday when we went from St Mary Abbott's to the house of that old Major-General who was still the head of my father's family. And here, for perhaps the first time, India crept into my consciousness, for the eldest son had been killed while serving with the British forces in the Chitral campaign, though as that minor frontier war had taken place in eighteen-hundred-and-ninety-five, when I was only two years old, I cannot but suppose that this must have been either the young man's birthday or the anniversary of his death.

The mother's sorrow when speaking of her dead son was very soon communicated to my grandmother, who was his great-aunt, and I was so shocked by the sight of the two old ladies with the tears coursing down their cheeks that I too broke out into lamentations and made such a noise that they were obliged to restrain their grief in order to stifle my yells.

From the time we went to live in Kensington and for some years afterwards we had an Irish cook. This was an elderly, slightly deaf and very respectable person and I was fond of her. She was also, I believe, fond of

me. At anyrate she often took me with her to what was then the Catholic pro-Cathedral, as well as to the neighbouring convent school, where, no doubt as a potential pupil, I was not only very kindly received by the nuns, but given the most sumptuous teas.

We lived only a few minutes from St. Stephen's, Gloucester Road, and it was to this church that I was once or twice taken by my nursemaid of the moment for one of its Sunday afternoon Children's Services. The incumbent at this time was not only the son of a Duke, which seemed to me unusual enough, but was renowned for his likeness to the portraits of King Henry the Eighth. Unfortunately, I had already been taught to look upon that monarch as being, although right from the religious point of view, a monster in human form, so that as far as I was concerned those no doubt charmingly-conducted children's services fell on deaf ears and I was thankful when I was able to escape with my nursemaid from the rather gloomy church and to go on to the Imperial Institute or the Natural History Museum.

As time went on I was taken by this nursemaid, or perhaps another, to a service at the local Baptist chapel ; and this came very near to converting me. I was deeply impressed by the fact that the prayers were extempore, as well as by the fervour with which they were spoken and I was positively delighted when, on leaving the chapel with my nursemaid who was herself a Baptist, I was addressed as 'sister', shaken warmly by the hand and besought to come again. Here too there were refreshments, though of a more homely kind than at the convent. This I

thought quite proper. I regarded rock cakes, with their somewhat sandy consistency and lack of flavour as altogether more suitable to a religious occasion than that most delectable of cream buns, the *éclair*.

I never knew my mother to go to church except when we were in the country, where, she having been country born, it gave her a nostalgic pleasure, always providing the neighbouring church was old enough to accord with her mood, to attend an occasional evening service. It was from her however that I learned my earliest prayers which were taken from Blake's 'Songs of Innocence' and when I grew to be of an age to go about with her she took me to an afternoon service at the Foundling Hospital, where the inmates, both boys and girls, still wore the dress of the time of George the First and where they sang the music of Handel to the very organ upon which that great composer had been in the habit of playing.

My father watched my variegated church-going with undisguised amusement. As he never for one moment feared that I, the descendant of generations of Alsatian *incroyants*, would stray from the path of scepticism that had been laid down for me, he did not think it necessary to enquire too closely into such dogma as I might be imbibing by the way. He had always been careful to impress on me that nobody of our world could admit to belonging to anything but the Church of England and he was right in thinking that up to this time I had come unscathed through the thickets of sectarian Christianity by which I had been beset. He was meanwhile to fail to reckon with a turn of events which no one could have

foreseen and in ignorance of which he was in fact always to remain.

As soon as I had turned four I had been sent to the kindergarten of our local girls' high school. There I had remained till I was eight, at which time, as I had all along been backward in reading, it was thought advisable to send me to a school where I should get rather more individual attention than I had been receiving till then. At the high school there had been a well-fitted gymnasium. At the private preparatory to which I was now sent there was no gymnasium, but we were presently to be introduced to a system of physical training without apparatus that was known as 'Swedish' exercises.

It would be of interest, if it were possible to do so, to trace the origin of these so-called 'Swedish' exercises, for they bore a distinct if somewhat distant relationship to what I now know to be the first stages of *hatha yoga*. Did they arise spontaneously in Scandinavia, or had they been brought by some Scandinavian traveller from India or Tibet? This may for all I know be a matter of general knowledge, but it was not known to us, nor were we taught them by anyone with the first inkling of what was to be the outcome of their unrestricted use.

For the next three years we practised this 'drill' with the greatest assiduity. We sat on the floor cross-legged and were encouraged when rising to our feet to abstain from helping ourselves by putting a hand to the ground; we breathed from deep down in the diaphragm instead of from further up; we strengthened our abdominal muscles to an unbelievable extent by drawing them in

and letting them out again and we performed a kind of hopping dance with knees bent known as the 'frog march', which bore no resemblance to any of the orthodox *asanas*, but that gave us leg-muscles of iron as well as much more than ordinary agility.

Those exercises had further results. One of my greatest friends of those days was the niece of a far-famed writer of adventure stories and she and I vied with one another in spartan practices. On getting home from school we would at once abandon our footgear (in my case sandals) and, rushing to our washstands would plunge our heads into a basinful of cold water. We prided ourselves on our indifference to fatigue, discomfort and pain. Visits to the dentist were welcomed by us as opportunities for displaying our capacity for silent endurance and we despised those amongst our fellows who had to be bribed with halfcrowns when any of their teeth needed to be pulled out. We even began to exhibit a tendency to vegetarianism, which meant that the shrimps and meat or fish-pastes of the tea-tables of the time, gave way to watercress, lettuce and radishes. When on holiday at the seaside we were pledged to walk barefoot to the seashore, however far it might be from where we were staying and however flinty the path and when bathing we would enter the sea as often as possible and would stay immersed till driven out of it by the exhortations of those in charge of us.

The odd thing to me, looking back, is that nobody seems to have noticed what we were about, for in fact, as far as the conquest of our bodies was concerned and

however unorthodox our methods, we were well on the way to becoming youthful *sadhus*. My mother did once remark with a good deal of feeling that we were becoming a great deal more muscular than she could have wished well brought-up young ladies to be, but that was all. If any of us experienced one or more of the different phenomena that are associated with the practice of yoga in its earlier stages we did not mention it to each other, nor, as far as I know, to anyone else.

In due course, and inevitably, things began to get out of hand. Our school day began with prayers and a hymn, went straight on to our Swedish exercises and then, after we had gone to our various class-rooms we embarked on the first lesson of the day, which was Scripture. It was nobody's fault that, taken in this sequence or at all, these things should have been in conflict with one another. Whether it is that, as is supposed, the practice of yoga in early life preserves the pineal gland from the atrophy that otherwise overtakes it, or whether it merely effects the control of that seat of the emotions which is known as the solar plexus, we had come to a stage where we were in need of something more intellectually stimulating than the rather babyish curriculum then in vogue in our preparatory schools. I fared better than most of my classmates because it had been found that I had some degree of mathematical ability, so that for arithmetic and algebra I was taught apart from the rest: but I defy anyone to make a success of an attempt to make sense of the Old and New Testaments to a number of intelligent and indeed highly

sophisticated boys and girls of the professional classes who are at the same time being instructed in yogic practices, unless the person who undertakes to do so is spiritually advanced. The hymns were bad enough, though we sang them with all the early morning vigour of our young lungs, but when it came to such of the passages of the Old Testament as were considered unfit for our youthful ears and we were put 'on our honour' not to read them, I regret to say we laughed. We were of course very careful indeed not to let our amusement show, but in spite of all our efforts to keep it hidden something of what we were feeling must have begun to make itself visible, for before long we were accused of a surely somewhat subtle sin that was known to our schoolmistresses as 'looking contemptuous'.

A thing that added to my particular troubles at this time was that on Monday mornings the senior boys and girls were questioned before the assembled school as to where they had been to church the previous day. I, of course, had hardly ever attended a religious service of any kind whatever and even if I had I felt pretty sure that it would have been one that would not have met with official approval.

I was amongst the oldest of the pupils and was not only a monitress but the head of the school: it was therefore upon my head that the disapprobation of our schoolmistresses descended. Looking back it seems to me that scarcely a day went by for months when I was not told that I was wanted in the headmistresses's room at twelve o'clock, for that was always the hour of doom.

What was said in the course of those many interviews I have now no sort of recollection; I only know that the last two years I spent at this school were the most harassed, anxious and miserable of my whole life.

Whether it was because I was in a low state of health as a result of all this, or because there was an epidemic of it in London at the time can only now be a matter of conjecture, but I chose this particular moment to go down with an attack of smallpox. If a last straw had been needed, this was it! Smallpox was looked upon in the England of those days, snobbish in this as in all else, as what was known as a 'dirt' disease, a word that was never for some reason applied to any of the so-called juvenile complaints such as measles, chicken-pox, or even scarlet fever, or diphtheria. Nothing could of course have been more ridiculous, but after a century of vaccination it had become so rare as to be regarded, together with what was then called 'spotted fever', but that now goes by the name of *poliomyelitis*, as a malady that could only be the result of some kind of hygienic carelessness on the part of those who contracted it.

I had been heavily vaccinated in infancy and, in accordance with the view then current that re-vaccination every seven years was sufficient to confer immunity, at least once since. Mine was therefore a relatively mild attack, mild enough indeed to permit of its being given forth that I was suffering from chicken-pox. This allowed of my being nursed at home instead of in the far-distant and still greatly-dreaded isolation hospital. A sheet steeped in a solution of carbolic was hung over the

doorway of my room; I was anointed with carron oil in order to allay the fearful itching and I can remember to this day the phantasms that assailed me during the crisis of the fever. One of these was that I had turned into a needle, that I had been dropped accidentally on the road and that approaching me inexorably and in such a way that it was bound to run over me, was a steam-roller. I must have been muttering or even crying out in protest while this illusion persisted, for I emerged from my fever to find my mother and father standing one on either side of my bed and both of them were in tears.

On returning to school after the required period of quarantine I was to know all the sensations of a pariah. Though an outward show was kept up of my having been ill of chicken-pox and not of the more serious disease, I knew that my schoolmistresses were not deceived and that added therefore to my other shames was that of having fallen a victim to a disorder which, being epidemic, should rightly afflict only the very poor. Later on it was to occur to me that mine may not have been the only case of smallpox in the school, but at the time I felt utterly disgraced and outcast.

Worse, however, was to come !

The time was approaching when the children in the top classes would be called upon to undergo confirmation in the Anglican faith and as it was unthinkable that we should any of us belong to any persuasion other than the Church of England and as we were all much of an age, it was thought that it would be a convenience to everybody, although we were not at

a boarding-school, if the confirmation classes were held in the school itself instead of, as would have been more customary, in the local vicarage or rectory.

Had I been older and been able to appreciate good English, I might have been delighted, when asked: 'Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe and to do, as they (my godparents at the time of my baptism) have promised for thee,' to answer in sonorous seventeenth-century prose: 'Yes, verily, and by God's help so I will.' But unfortunately that was precisely what I could not say, for when I had looked up the Publick Baptism of Infants, I was appalled by the nature of the vows that had been taken on my behalf and that I was now to be called upon to ratify. For instance, I had been pledged, all unknowingly, being then unable to understand any spoken word whatsoever, not only to renounce the devil and all his works, but the pomp and glory of the world and the carnal desires of the flesh. But worst of all, I should now have to repeat the Apostles' Creed and that would entail my declaring in the most solemn circumstances possible, for the Bishop's hand would but lately have been resting on my head, that I believed in the resurrection of the dead, and what, oh what, was meant by the resurrection of the dead?

It was now borne in on me that there was some tremendous mystery behind all this, which people either did not understand, or that for some reason best known to themselves they were unwilling to expound for the benefit of those younger than they were. I tried my best to make my position clear, only to be met with

blank looks. I could of course understand that well enough, because the Anglican Order of Confirmation ended with the truly terrifying words, printed in very small type, which somehow made them seem even more threatening :

And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed.

I was not in the least ready and so could not be thought of as desirous, this therefore seemed to me to smell of bell, book and candle. Presently, sure enough, and not at all to my surprise, my father was asked to remove me from the school on the grounds that I was a subversive influence. At thirteen years old, therefore, and with all that I had in me of respect for what seemed to me the truth, I was as good as expelled.

My grandmother died when I was twelve years old. Had it been otherwise I feel sure she would have vetoed my being entered at the type of school to which I was now sent on the grounds of its being both too expensive and too worldly. I myself had wanted to go to St. Paul's School for Girls, then newly-opened, but as it happened there lived in the same street as ourselves the headmistress of a London 'finishing' school. This lady was an acquaintance of ours and was in my parents' view an intelligent and, what was more, an accomplished woman, who, as we could see, led precisely the life of the cultivated wife and mother of the donnish circles to which we were accustomed.

My father was of his epoch and he argued that I showed no sign of being the competitive type of schoolgirl for whom St. Paul's had been designed; that, thank heaven, no daughter of his needed to think of the necessity of earning a living and that, in fact, all a girl of our world needed to do was to grow up graceful, charming and, of course, accomplished.

Compared to my former school this new one was, materially-speaking, shabby, but with the shabbiness of an establishment that was so sure of its position that it did not need to bother about appearances. My former school had had as a large proportion of its pupils the children of the learned and artistic professions : this one catered for the daughters of the rich and of the aristocracy.

Here, for instance, one never heard mention of the word 'religion'. It was accepted as a matter of course that one's manner of worship was one's own affair and it would have been regarded as the height of ill-breeding to enquire when and where one had been to church. Here also, instead of the new Swedish drill, we did a little mild marching about in the speech room, stopping occasionally to thrust out our arms in a perfunctory and semi-apologetic way and merely for the purpose of discouraging a socially disadvantageous round shoulderedness. The 'finishing' was in fact designed to fit us for the life of the English country house, where, since the activities of the body were held to be of more importance than those of the mind, the useableness of the body was taken more or less for granted.

This school differed from the other in no way so

much as in its general methods of teaching. Here the lessons were given for the most part in the form of lectures at which the pupils took notes. There was an altogether pleasant atmosphere of go-as-you-please about the place ; we were encouraged to specialise in subjects we liked and no particular pressure was put upon us to bother with those that did not interest us. At my former school I had been not only one of the older pupils, but, according to its not very exacting standards, amongst the more advanced. Here I was one of the youngest and it was immediately borne in on me that I was looked upon as conscientious and no more. This did not worry me at all. I was of course unable to guess what might lie ahead of me and was glad not to have to work up the subjects which I had either not touched, such as physics, chemistry and any but the more elementary mathematics, or in which I was notoriously weak, such as languages. There was a good deal of complaint about my handwriting, but this I attributed to the difference in the fashion which governed those at the two schools. At the first mine had been commended for its neatness and legibility; here these characteristics seemed to be considered drawbacks rather than otherwise. For that matter, my writing was never *small* enough for my liking and there were many times when I would begin a piece of writing only to tear it up to begin again in a smaller and therefore to me more satisfactory hand. I did not know then and was not in fact to know until I reached the age of forty, that I was a victim of the defect of vision which is popularly known as 'latent squint'. There was

nothing visibly wrong with my eyes, but as I was only able to see with one at a time and had therefore all unknowingly to suppress the vision of the other, I was without stereoscopy, saw colour devoid of its lucency and could not perceive depth or roundness. I have recorded elsewhere all that this has meant to me in my passage through life, so that I do not propose to dwell on it here at greater length than to say that it went far towards making me impossible to educate by the ordinarily accepted means.

One of the results of my undiscovered visual defect was that if ever I had reason to rejoice while I was still in England it was that I was contemporary with the cinema. As luck would have it, one of the first picture-houses to be opened in England was within easy distance of my home. This was not by modern or any other standards a luxurious place. The seats were designed not so much for comfort as because the audience could not be expected to stand and as they were not stepped it was often a matter of difficulty to see over or between the heads of those in front of one. Then too, smoking was allowed and in spite of every effort of the management, which included the provision of what we were assured was a 'special' system of ventilation and the frequent spraying of the air with a highly-scented vaporised liquid which was announced as being oxygen, the atmosphere was almost always next door to impenetrable. Nevertheless I took very warmly indeed

to this new form of entertainment for the very good reason that my seeing was, so to speak, being done for me.

For a long time after the films became a factor in my life they hailed almost exclusively from the United States and it was not long before the word 'America' stood as the symbol to me of a promised land. No amount of reading of the kind best calculated to disillusion me could unseat my enthusiasm and if I dreamed, as I sometimes did, that I was in some part of that country, it was to experience what I can only describe as bliss.

It was not very long before I was destined to hear adverse criticism of what was to me sheer delight. My attention was drawn to the fact that it was 'only a series of photographs'; that it was *flat*; that it lacked colour. There were those amongst our friends who went to the length of saying that they preferred the worst of stage plays to the best of films. My parents belonged to a set in whose lives aesthetic judgments played a major part and my pleasure in the cinema was looked upon by many of our friends as at worst the outcome of philistinism, at best a pose. I, in my turn, thought of their contempt for it as evidence of their mistrust of anything new; as a form in fact of artistic old-fogeydom. Meanwhile, nothing short of obvious and permanent damage to my eyesight would have interfered with my enjoyment of a method of seeing which, for the first time in my experience, was devoid of strain with its accompaniments of discomfort and pain and my one prayer was that nothing would happen to take it away from me.

PART TWO

I arrived in Calcutta towards the end of the year nineteen-thirty-two. It seemed to me strange then and does so still, that I should ever have turned my steps towards India, for in addition to the fact that all my enthusiasms that were not European belonged to the lands across the Atlantic, I had with one exception read and heard very little that had inclined me towards either India or the Indian people.

No doubt high amongst the reasons for this stood the fact that amongst my father's many cousins was a member of the 'Theosophical Society' whose first name being Ernest had come to be known by the more irreverent members of the family as 'carnest' Ernest. Nothing was too extreme in the way of belief for this extraordinary man. He was, among other things, a Baconian, that is to say one who believed the plays of Shakespeare to have been written by Francis Bacon. But this was not all, for he sought to persuade us that he himself was the reincarnation in our day of no less an one than the great Elizabethan Lord Chancellor. This gave him a distinct pull over the rest of us when it came to things Indian, for even if we did not 'question the authorship of the plays that most of us were content to regard as having been written by William Shakespeare and were not prepared to believe that Ernest possessed, buried away somewhere in his unconscious, the combined

talents, not to say genius of Bacon and Shakespeare, we could not help feeling that the claim itself must surely indicate that he knew a thing or two that we did not, especially as it became manifest in due course that he had developed what we had been led to understand were 'occult' powers.

By the time I was old enough to realise what this elderly cousin of ours was about he had given up the eating of animal food in any form whatsoever, was wearing rope-soled sandals in order to avoid the contact of leather and had foresworn the use of soap because it contained animal fat. It goes without saying that I have met a great many people since then who practise these austerities either wholly or in part and as a matter of ritual or plain common sense, but in the England of my youth those who did not eat meat, unless they were forbidden to do so on grounds of health, were looked upon as cranks, no more no less, while it was regarded as one of the worst deprivations of the very poor that they were only able to afford it every so often. This being so, it is easy to imagine the sensation that was caused one day at our luncheon table by Ernest's refusal to eat a salad that had been specially prepared for him because it contained one or two small spring onions. What was to become of our poor cousin, we wondered, if, in addition to abstaining from every sort of animal food, he could not bring himself to eat that which in all the southern countries of Europe was a staple article of diet, namely, the onion? Our dismay was to become complete when presently it was rumoured of him that he had reached a

point where the only foodstuffs he could bring himself to consume were jam sandwiches.

The last of Ernest's exploits of which I have any knowledge, he being then over seventy, was his having paraded down London's Regent Street at midday bearing boards on his chest and back after the manner of what in England is known as a sandwichman, upon which was set forth in the boldest possible characters, a denunciation of meat-eating. At some juncture during his progress down this, one of the principal shopping-centres of the West End of London, he was set upon by angry butchers, though fortunately without suffering any hurt, but all the sympathy he got from those of his relations who did not share his views, was the schoolboyish comment : 'Serves him jolly well right !'

It was unfortunate that throughout the days of my youth 'earnest' Ernest should have stood for me as representing the Theosophical Society, for I now know that body as one that has done much good work in bringing the philosophical outlook of the East to a West which has always stood sorely in need of a widening of its spiritual horizons. This was the more so as I was being confronted, had I only known it, with the results of those very processes, though in an equally misinterpreted form, which had caused my own turnings towards asceticism as a child of eleven. But whereas in my case these had come about quite naturally and with so little surrounding fuss that no one but myself and my

fellow-practitioners had taken any notice of them, our Theosophical cousin had been doing just what is so strongly deprecated by the Sages, that is to say, exhibiting to the ignorant that which would have been very much better kept locked within his own breast.

Another family matter that tended to distort our view of India in the days of my youth was that a cousin of my father's had married a sister of Lord Curzon's. Apart from the fact that whenever my father and mother called on one of the most formidable of our rich old family friends she made a point of alluding to 'your cousin Lord Curzon', this made very little difference to us. We belonged to the academic world and our real cousin, who was now the brother-in-law of the Viceroy of India, was an owner of race-horses and a multi-millionaire and of the members of two such widely-separated strata of English society it can truly be said that never the twain shall meet. But a cousin by marriage is after all in some sort a relation and this was one who, according to my father might, had he occupied a less exalted position, have left behind him a reputation for being a true friend of India. Thus my childhood had been punctuated with the name 'Curzon' said without any prefix, as it might have been Pitt or Gladstone, or any other of the really great and I have very little doubt but what this will have set up in my mind, however mildly, a measure of prejudice against those who belittled him.

Soon after the outbreak of the First World War, I joined the staff of the Bank of England, but a year of

working for the twelve hours a day made necessary by the fact that we were handling the War Loan on an overtime basis, caused me to give notice at the end of twelve months and to take the place of an invoice clerk who had been called up for military service in an old-established mercantile firm that had many dealings with India. Here I was to be thrilled on the one hand by the romantic aspects of the shipping of goods to such places as Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, but to be further prejudiced on the other when I learned that my employers held a very low opinion of Indian commercial integrity owing to the fact that goods of Indian origin were only too often found on delivery to be below the standard of the samples previously received by us, or not to be strictly according to specification.

Then again, there was the publication in the year nineteen-twenty-seven of Katherine Mayo's 'Mother India'. In his combined aspects as custodian of a great scientific library and a lover of things Indian, my father read the book as soon as it came out. He then brought it home to me, saying: 'You should read this, but I should like you to know my view, which is, that this kind of thing could be written about any country on earth by anyone who chose to indulge in sufficient muck-raking.'

I cannot pretend that I was not horrified by 'Mother India'. There was no one to point out to me that it was a work which had been written, not only out of a profound ignorance of India, but of life itself, so that I was left with the feeling that nothing would induce

me to set foot in a country where such things as I had read of within its covers could take place.

All these things were to be counterbalanced however, if not for the moment completely wiped out, by the seeming accident of my being taken to hear Krishnamurti.

I have to admit that hitherto I had been violently prejudiced against this young man and it was therefore much against my better judgment that I allowed myself to be persuaded to be taken to hear him speak. As our cousin Ernest had been connected with the Theosophical Society from its inception, it needs hardly to be said that we had heard a great deal from him about the young South Indian Brahmin who was being prepared to break on us in due course as the new World Teacher. Ernest had by this time taken Holy Orders in the Liberal Catholic Church and was now known, not as Ernest, but as Francis, so that he did not hesitate to make a claim for the young Krishnamurti that I, in spite of my long-established agnosticism, found horribly blasphemous. So I was dragged unwillingly to the Meeting House of the Society of Friends in London's Euston Road to hear words that were to begin to change my outlook on India.

I believe it had been a matter of considerable difficulty to secure a seat for me, an outsider, on this momentous night and had I not been the guest of another of our Theosophical cousins, I do not suppose I should have been admitted, for the hall was packed. This was the first time I had ever attended a meeting of the Theosophical Society, or indeed of any religious or

philosophical body, except for a single occasion on which I had heard Mrs. Besant address the Union of East and West: I did not therefore in the least realise that the people who surrounded us on all sides were in a state of the most profound agitation because he whom they had been taught to look upon as a divine being who had come to earth to disseminate truth, was in the process of repudiating most of the claims that had been made for him.

All I saw when he presently walked quietly in and took his place between the two vases of red roses which were the sole decoration of the high Friends' rostrum, was a slight, not very tall, young-looking man with a remarkable head, who was wearing, instead of the Eastern robes I had envisaged beforehand, an ordinary blue serge suit. Having failed to visualise a person in all respects so contemporary-looking as the one I now saw, I had forgotten that he and his audience were well-known to each other and I had expected that he would be introduced by a chairman, or that he would at least have been supported on the platform by some of his followers. Great was my surprise, therefore, when I saw him standing there quite alone, waiting for the abatement of the humming sound which is the most that an educated gathering can allow itself by way of applause on such an occasion, before beginning to speak.

To say that I can remember all that was said by Krishnamurti that night would be to go beyond the bounds of credibility. Moreover, since his is the socratic method of question and answer, only verbatim reporting

can do justice to any particular meeting. I do remember, however, that I heard for the first time such words as 'realisation', 'liberation' and 'experience' in their purely spiritual connotation. From time to time he said things that seemed to distress his hearers and then there rose from that immense gathering a kind of suppressed moan. This was particularly the case when he said that to him institutions which were formed round Truth were absolutely unnecessary because it was not possible to organise a belief without its becoming at once a dogma, a creed. But moan as they might, he remained outwardly unmoved. It seemed to me that I had never seen anyone so calm. So impressed was I indeed by his appearance of calmness that without my being aware of any noticeable inconsistency, I found myself thinking: 'This is how Christ must have appeared to his followers. This is what was meant by speaking with authority. He too must often have said things his hearers did not like.'

My cousin was to tell me afterwards that many of Krishnamurti's statements at this meeting she had not understood. This astonished me, for I felt that I had been aware of the meaning of every word he had spoken. I had in fact had the rare experience that night of being present when certain ideas were expressed at the exact moment when I was ready to absorb them.

Before leaving England I had been given a great deal of information and advice, none of which as it turned out was to prove either very accurate or very helpful.

Amongst other things I was told by a woman friend who had spent a large part of her life in India that I should not need to take any walking shoes with me because it was impossible to walk about in the Indian countryside. By the same token I should find that the picnic was something one could not enjoy. This, I gathered, was because there were snakes. The same friend shook her head sadly at the notion that I might be looking forward to coming across all sorts of splendid tropical flowers. Marigolds there would be, oh yes, but I must be prepared to say goodbye for ever to the beloved flowers of our English woods and gardens, while as for roses, there simply weren't any !

This lady must I think have spent all her time in India in some peculiarly arid spot. But none of these things seemed to me to matter. I was going to India to be married and was prepared to take what I found there with all the philosophy at my command. In any case, and always supposing what I had been told was strictly true, I was not addicted to walking for its own sake; my father had been an inveterate picnicker; so that I could say with truth that I should not mind if I were never to have another meal out of doors; I had no phobia at all where snakes were concerned and as for flowers, I liked the marigold, though not as much as did my father who had always declared that it was his favourite flower.

The odd thing was that in spite of all its apparent drawbacks everyone who knew that I was going to India appeared to envy me. This, I supposed, was on account of the climate, for that seemed to be about all that could

be thought of as rendering the country superior to England. There were, of course, the plentiful servants, but here again I was warned that I should have been much better off from the domestic point of view if I had been going to *China*, for there I must understand one first-class 'boy'—and most of them were first-class—could be relied on to do the work of two or three of his Indian opposite numbers. A Chinese houseboy was of course liable to go off and leave one suddenly for undisclosed reasons of his own, whereas if an Indian servant fell out through illness or because he had asked to go home for a time, his place was automatically filled during his absence by someone whom I should find would be called a *badli*. But I must not let this deceive me into thinking that the Indian servant was anything like the treasure that was his Chinese counterpart. Here again, I did not let this disturb me. The very thought of any servants at all was a comfort to someone who, like myself, had long been dependant on the services of a 'daily' who, besides being very irregular in her attendance, was extremely expensive.

Meanwhile, there were those of my acquaintance who thought me strangely indifferent to the fact that I was going to live in Calcutta and especially that I was about to spend the coming Christmas there, for that, according to them, was a very smart thing to do. There would be racing and polo, garden-parties and balls. This information left me singularly cold. I had never attended a race-meeting and never, if I could by any means help it meant to, and it was many years since

in my middle teens I had thought a polo match the most exciting thing I was ever likely to see. As for garden-parties and balls, though my mental picture of such events fell far short in the direction of splendour of what they were to prove to be, it seemed at least as though they might be occasions that would give opportunities for human contacts.

It was true that matters had not been helped as far as I was concerned by some of the requests that had been included in his recent letters by my husband-to-be. 'You must be sure,' he had written, 'to bring with you an ample supply of *long white gloves*, for they are compulsory at all functions at which the Viceroy and Vicereine are present,' and when I thought of the long and explicit cable that had arrived shortly before I was due to leave in which he had asked me to secure for him a *dress sword* and *man's wig* suitable to be worn with a costume of the time of Charles the First, my forebodings were complete.

As things turned out neither sword nor wig were ever to be worn by the sender of that cable. The fancy-dress ball at Belvedere for which they would have been needed was timed to take place when he was away on a case and many years later they were unearthed and given away to the Amateur Dramatic Club of Calcutta, to be kept with its stock of properties and theatrical costumes.

I went to the ball at Belvedere with the Magistrate of the 24-Parganas and his wife and I was very glad I did because it was a most impressive sight. The Viceroy and

Vicereine attended in the guise of King Charles the First and Queen Henrietta Maria with their housesold as members of the court. They made a stately entry, to be followed soon after by Sir John Anderson as Warren Hastings with the Government house staff in eighteenth-century dress.

Never had I seen, nor was I ever again to see such magnificence as I saw that night. The Indian princes were of course present in full force, resplendent in their traditional dresses and incredible jewels. I remember being bidden to take special note of the crowns worn by the royalties from Nepal, for the immense emeralds which depended from them were justly famous.

Belvedere is still one of the sights of Calcutta for it is now the very handsome, modern and well-equipped National Library, a model of its kind. Whenever I go there I picture once again the dazzling scene that had been spread before me in the January of nineteen-thirty-three, but, being what I am, without any accompanying nostalgia.

It hardly needs to be said that none of the prognostications of my friend from the more arid part of India turned out to be true. I soon bought myself a pair of stout walking shoes: picnics were the order of the day: it was to be years before I so much as caught a glimpse of a snake outside a zoo, while as for flowers, not only were almost all the English varieties to be found in the gardens of our friends, but so plentiful and lovely were the roses to be bought in the Newmarket in Calcutta that I once took a photograph of a vase of superb Frau

Karl Drushkis which was standing on my drawing-room table with a view to sending it back to England in refutation of that particular slander.

It was to be the same with the question of servants. I have never been in China, but I have had nothing whatever to complain of with my Indian household though when I say that our Kumaoni bearer is now in the thirty-eighth year of his service with my husband and myself it may well be thought that I have been unusually fortunate in this respect.

I had elected to travel to Calcutta the long way round. This had been partly for economy's sake but mostly because I wanted to stop at Madras, for the cousin who had taken me to hear Krishnamurti was now living at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar.

I arrived at Madras in a very depressed frame of mind : so much so that I had even given consideration to the question whether I should not do wisely to leave the ship there and wait for the next one home. This was because in the four weeks or so that the voyage had so far taken, most of my fellow-passengers and especially the female part of them, seemed to me never to have been entirely sober ! This was something about which I had had no warning and if unbridled drinking in any circle in which I found myself were to be added to all the rest, marriage or no marriage, India would be no place for me.

I had been brought up, as I have said, in the

academic world, where excessive drinking is on the whole rare. On the other hand, having been born in the early 'nineties I was very well accustomed to the notion of drunkenness as afflicting some of the members of our circle. It was true also that I had seen a deterioration in the drinking habits of some of the members of the English middle-classes, who, since the end of the First World War had fallen into the way of frequenting the public house, but at the same time the working-people had become much more abstemious than in the past, while the women of my world, both old and young were still at the stage where, even if they were addicted to alcohol in private, would never have dreamt of drinking spirits in front of other people. What, then, was I to make of the roystering that had been taking place on board? Two of the younger women who were on the same deck as I was were, I knew, going through matrimonial crises of various sorts and one I think had lately been divorced, but whether they drank because they had been unable to make successes of their married lives, or whether it was their drinking that had led to their present troubles, were questions only they could answer. Their \carousels took place for the most part in the cabin of the ship's doctor and the sounds of their revelry had been heard most nights as they emerged from it to get what sleep they might in the very short time before dawn.

But as soon as we dropped anchor in the harbour at Madras, all these things were to be as though they had never been, for, drawn up along the mole in

readiness for the unloading of such of the cargo as was destined for that port, was a row of men and women dressed in scarlets and blues, purples and yellows, of a richness that was sufficiently powerful to penetrate even my somewhat dulled colour-sense. I saw now what my father had meant when he had complained of the failure of his kinsfolk to describe the colours of the East. This was in fact the first time in my life that I had seen colours that were produced by vegetable dyes, or that I had seen colour at all in so bright a light as that of the midday sun of India and I can only compare my condition to that of the individual who, having been accustomed to hearing nothing but what is known as 'light' music, suddenly hears one of the great symphonies.

My cousin was waiting for me on the dock and as the ship had been late in tying up at her berth, I found myself whisked off at once to Adyar.

By comparison with the glimpse I had just had of what has been so aptly described as the 'georgious' East, the Theosophical Society's headquarters struck me as somewhat drab. This may have been because I had chosen a bad moment for my visit, for, unknown to me, Annie Besant was even then in her last illness. Nevertheless, despite the overriding atmosphere of gloom that was no doubt due to this fact, the luncheon table was decorated with a most exquisite arrangement of flower-petals and pollen which I was told had been the work of the gardener or *mali*. I took this so much for granted, as indeed I was to do with regard to a great deal else in my first days in India, that I did not think

to ask whether this table-centre was an everyday creation. I wish I had; for this was one of the signs that the superb natural craftsmanship of the Indian peasant was not yet dead.

Lunch over, my cousin and I sat out on the seashore at the mouth of the Adyar river and it was while we were sitting there that I was to have one of the most valuable lessons in social deportment that has ever come my way.

In speaking of someone or other whom I had recently encountered, I had in all innocence used the word 'native'. This was met by my cousin with a very grave reproof. 'You must never,' she said, 'use that word in speaking of or to an Indian.' 'But,' I protested, 'we often use it in England. I should, for instance, speak of my mother as having been 'a native' of the Isle of Wight. And what about Thomas Hardy's "Return of the Native"?' 'That's all very well', was my cousin's reply, 'but I am warning you never to use the word in this country. It has come to be looked upon as an insult.'

I was fearfully abashed. * The only other occasion in my life when I had felt so cast down by something I had said was when, as a child of eight, I had inadvertently alluded to the shape of a human nose as 'Jewish' in the presence of someone whom I afterwards realised to be a member of that race. I had never forgotten my horror at what I had done then and I was only thankful that I

had received my warning in time to escape giving offence to someone of Indian birth. I saw now that all I had been hearing about India hitherto had been said from the point of view of what I might expect to get out of her and her people, not what I might quite rightly be expected to give in return, such as courtesy, consideration, even kindness. I had in fact come away from the country to which I belonged and was henceforth to be in one where I was a guest. Under my cousin's quiet and observant gaze I there and then swore to myself that I would do my best from now on never to forget that fact.

I have very little recollection of the rest of that day. I was taken, I know, to see the Hall of Faiths, but I am afraid it did not meet with the enthusiastic response on my part that was expected of me. I was not ready then to produce reasons for what I was feeling, but I now know that the notion was even then beginning to foment in my mind that it is no good trying to produce a synthesis out of elements so incompatible as are the various religions. For what we know as 'religion' consists almost entirely of the symbolisation of the abstract and as the adherents of the different religions of the world have an unfortunate way of thoroughly disliking the symbols and observances of every other form of faith but their own, in so far as they can be got to resemble one another, let alone merge, it can only be by way of the central truth of what the Greeks knew so succinctly as the *noumenon*. The rest, being the work of the hand of man, is surely diversity: some of it reasonable; some of

it artistically great; but most of it fantastic, therefore to the uninitiated absurd and even in some instances positively grotesque.

Of all the ports which we had visited on the way out from England Madras was the only one where we were to spend no more than a few hours. I had therefore to get back to the ship before the evening was too far advanced.

Here again, I fear I was destined to be a disappointment to my cousin. My visit had coincided with what I had been told was the Festival of Lights and as we went along in the 'bus I was enraptured by the sight of the rows of little shops, each one outlined with the candles that I had always so far associated with the Christmas tree. This was the India I remembered from the models at the Imperial Institute and it awoke in me nostalgic memories of the Sunday afternoons of my youth. My cousin of course knew these little shops in their everyday guise and I could feel that she did not believe that I was genuine in my exclamations of delight at the charmingly arranged mounds of fruit and foodstuffs, so symmetrical and so full of colour, no less than at the shopkeepers seated cross-legged in their midst. Moreover, she was anxious that I should have what she considered a 'good' first impression of an India in which she had admitted to me she herself had been disappointed and as 'good' for her included punctuality, she was excessively irritated by the way in which the 'bus kept on stopping to pick up passengers and, having stopped, waiting for others to turn up. We were at cross-purposes

in this as we had been in so many ways all day so that it would have been useless for me to tell her that I should have liked the 'bus-ride to go on indefinitely. I have never seen her again and although we have sometimes exchanged letters, I have never felt that either at the Friends' Meeting House when we had heard Krishnamurti, or on that drive back to the ship at Madras, were we hearing what we heard with the same ears, or seeing what we looked at with the same eyes.

It had been arranged that I was to spend the weeks till the time of my marriage in the house of the Magistrate of the 24-Pargannas, which is the enormous eighteenth-century mansion at Alipore in which William Makepeace Thackeray spent some of his early years.

As this was the very end of nineteen-thirty-two, when the terrorist movement was still going strong, the grounds of the house were surrounded by a barbed-wire entanglement and a detachment of Gurkhas was encamped on the downstairs verandah. Though I had not been told anything about this beforehand I have no recollection of feeling the slightest surprise when, on arriving at the gate, we were challenged by a sentry who, on seeing that we were Britishers, gave us a smart salute and allowed us to pass. I can only suppose that I had been conditioned by what had been appearing in the English press with regard to India, to being prepared for anything. It is a shortcoming of mine that I seldom

think to ask questions and I can now therefore only surmise that the reason for these defensive measures was that Thackeray House is bounded on the one hand by that tidal backwater of the river Hooghly known as Tolly's Nullah, while on two of its others are the high-walled compounds of the Central and Alipore Jails, which facts may be supposed to have rendered it peculiarly vulnerable to armed attack.

What was to surprise me in the course of the next few weeks was that I should have been offered hospitality at such a time and for what might well have been a prolonged period by people to whom I was totally unknown. Such a state of things would have been unthinkable in any circle in which I was likely to move in England. I was close on forty years of age and there were a number of hotels and boarding-houses in Calcutta where, for more than one reason, it would have been much more convenient for me to be. But in thinking that I was reckoning without something that was to become very obvious to me as time went on, which was that most of the English people in India were in general living in a past that had long gone by; that they were in fact survivals of an epoch when there were no hotels or boarding-houses in India worthy of the name and none, certainly, where an unprotected female might be permitted to stay.

This business of being an unprotected female was to prove the most trying part of my experiences when I first lived in Calcutta, for I, who had been living alone since the deaths of my parents and who had all my life

been accustomed to going about without escort in every sort of public vehicle, suddenly found myself in a city where it was not considered permissible for a European man or woman of any standing to travel by 'bus or tram. My host and hostess were matchlessly kind and it was far from being fault of theirs that I found it excessively irksome to have to be dependent on them for transport. At the same time, I could not help seeing that a certain incongruity arose out of the fact that whenever my host went out in his car he was obliged to carry a loaded revolver. We used to laugh when the weapon was handed to him by his *chaprassi*, but it seemed to me that when it came to being the unprotected female I should have been a great deal safer by myself in a tram or 'bus than sitting by the side of a man whose life was in danger from the assassin's bullet. But of course it was not my *life* that needed to be taken into consideration so much as my reputation. I was about to join the ranks of the *memsahibs* and there were a great many things that the *memsahib* could not do.

One of the first things I learned was that she could not be friendly with Indians. Of course there were Indians and Indians and those whose loyalty to the British Raj was unimpeachable, or who happened to be Christians, were not only to be included amongst her friends but were even, in the words of Polonius, to be grappled to her soul with hooks of steel. This placed me in a very awkward position, because my future husband was a barrister, which meant that many of the people I met when I was with him were

very far indeed from belonging to the last-named category.

But it was when the time approached for our wedding that what this was really to mean was brought home to me. We were to be married in St Paul's Cathedral and it was obvious from the invitations which were being sent out that at least half the friends of the bridegroom would be Bengalis. This was going to cause a special difficulty in that it had been the intention of my host and hostess to entertain the wedding-guests at their house after the ceremony and by a recent Government ukase no Indian who was not persona grata with the higher authorities might be admitted to the Magistrate's House at Alipore. There was nothing for it, then, but that we should give a party on neutral ground for our Indian friends as soon as possible after our marriage.

We not only gave one party, we gave two. The first was nothing but a tea-drinking, was for the more senior amongst my husband's friends and took place in our own flat. The second was for younger folk, was much larger and lapped over into the flat next door, which happened to be empty and where we were able to have a conjuring show, complete with stage and apparatus.

I do not believe it to be any exaggeration to say that these two parties of ours have become part of the current saga of Calcutta's social life, though why this should be so unless it was that my husband and I were the only Europeans present, I cannot think.

For my own part they have now grown somewhat dim in my recollection except for one thing. Among our guests on the first day was the then Acting Chief Justice of Bengal who was a Kulin Brahmin and orthodox. I believe it had been thought that he would not accept our invitation, but he did. He even consented to sit at a small table by himself where he drank tea and ate one or two sweetmeats. I was aware that this fact was causing something of a sensation amongst our other guests and presently it was conveyed to me in a whisper that this was the first time in his life that this distinguished jurist had ever been known to eat anything that had not been prepared in his own house. Impressions had been crowding in on me up to this time at such a rate that I was incapable of appreciating the significance of what this might mean: all I realised was that for some subtle reason which I couldn't at the moment quite grasp, we were being looked upon as highly honoured.

If I had been inclined to take any umbrage to myself on this score I was presently to undergo an experience which was well calculated to deflate my ego.

Very soon after our marriage my husband took me with him when he went on a case to North Bengal. His client was at that time a political prisoner and was in fact serving his sentence in the local jail. Instead therefore of the discussions concerning the case taking place in the litigant's own house and in his presence, they took place without him in the dak bungalow where we were staying. There were two local advocates

appearing with my husband, one of whom was an elderly and most courtly Brahmin, a Bengali of the old school. These two lawyers came back with my husband after court hours on the first day of hearing and while they were holding their consultation, tea was brought in. I poured it out and proceeded to hand a cup to the seniormost person present, when, to my utter astonishment he refused point blank to take it from me, not on the grounds, which I could have well understood, that he was not in the habit of taking tea, or that he did not happen to want it at that moment, but that he could not take it from my hands !

To say that I was taken aback is to put it altogether too mildly. If he had slapped my face I could hardly have been more dismayed. I had the sensation, so common in moments of disaster, that this was something that could not have happened to me. I had of course heard of untouchability, but that I should learn what it was to be treated as an untouchable had never once crossed my mind. I think I might have understood the situation better if the dear old advocate who was refusing to accept my hospitality had up to that time ever shown me anything but friendship of the most delicate and appreciative kind, or if, instead of its being a cup of tea that I was offering him, it had been food which might have been contaminated in some way. As it was my recoil must have shown only too plainly in my face, for he immediately began to excuse himself by explaining that as he had never taken sustenance of any kind from the hand of someone not of his own caste,

he could not bring himself to resile from such long-established custom at his time of life. Even after that I must still have shown signs of what I was feeling, because he then embarked on the story of how, years before, his wife had been nursed through a dangerous illness by the wife of the then collector of the place, a fact for which he and his family had never ceased to be profoundly grateful. From this, since the benevolent lady in question must have been English, I saw that I was meant to realise that he had no grudge against Englishwomen as such.

That this really very minor episode left no scar behind it as far as I was concerned may be gathered from the fact that my husband and I were always afterwards to agree that our dear old advocate was one of the most charming human beings we had ever known. It did on the other hand teach me something about the caste system in that it showed me how far an otherwise intelligent individual can allow habit to replace good sense. I was to feel this again later when a very pampered Brahmin *chaprassi* of my husband's refused to take some uncut fruit from me and, later still, when a young Brahmin schoolmaster, who had had infinite kindness at our hands, told me that his family had taken him severely to task for permitting himself to eat under our roof.

Coming from a land where we have no admitted taboos where eating and drinking are concerned—though I think that there are at least two that are not generally recognised—I could not help feeling deep

down inside myself that this was one of the things that was bad for India as a whole, because, strange as it might seem, nowhere else in the world, except perhaps amongst the Jews, who are of course great traditionalists, would such rebuffs be called by any other name but plain and simple bad manners.

*

It was to come to seem to me in time that the principal reason why India and Great Britain came to loggerheads was that they did not know enough about each other's habits and customs. The relationship between the peoples was in many ways at its best in the eighteenth century. It was when the romantic revival had become established in England that things began to go seriously wrong and that was I think because the leading characteristic of the romantic is his refusal to face facts that he finds disagreeable and, more particularly, those that tend to rob him of his view of himself as a 'reasonable' human being.

One of the facts that the romantically-minded Britisher has always been loth to face is that superstition is every bit as rife in Great Britain as it is in India. The pity of it is that India was never in a position to find this out. The Folklore Society of England was not founded until eighteen-sixty-six and was only to publish the first number of its *Record* more than ten years later. The proceedings of this society would have opened the eyes of India to much to which it remains blind even to-day.

Not so many years ago some Englishmen got together and founded a body called *The Men of the Trees* and

what the members of this organisation have discovered in the way of peculiar beliefs in connection with what can only be thought of as the tree worship that is still extant in the British Isles, would be very surprising indeed to those Indians who are accustomed to hearing certain sections of their fellow-countrymen spoken of as being exceptionally superstitions.

One of the only serious disagreements that ever arose between my husband and myself was due to the fact that he, as an East Anglian and a lawyer, was in ignorance of the superstitions to which I, as a Londoner and one who had always been on intimate terms with our household servants, had been brought up. He simply could not believe me, for instance, when I told him that the month of May is considered so inauspicious that only the boldest spirits dare tempt fortune to the extent of being married between the thirtieth of April and the first of June and that green must never be worn at a wedding. There were some taboos he *had* heard of as, for example, that one must never pass beneath a ladder, or break a mirror, or allow steel knives to be crossed and, above all, that thirteen must never be allowed to sit down together at a table, but he maintained that I was joking when I said that on no account must branches of the May-flowering trees be brought into any inhabited dwelling-house and that this applied particularly to the white variety of lilac. By this time, as the argument was threatening to become acrimonious, I did not go so far as to add that one must never open an umbrella in the house, or place a pair of new boots or

shoes on the top of a piece of furniture; far less did I venture to mention that to my certain knowledge there were still places in England where the belief, not only in witchcraft, but in death at the stake as its just reward, continued to hold sway; or that it was considered to be inviting the most desperate ill-fortune for a child at some future date, if its finger-nails, instead of being bitten off by its mother in the first years of its life, were to be trimmed with anything made of steel. But what with one thing and another, as a well-known writer on the subject has so truly said : ' to examine the whole corpus of English folklore would take a few dozen volumes and a round score of years to write them.'*

There is, however, one direction in which I cannot help thinking that this ignorance of each other's customs has been a calamity, and that is with regard to the question of what it is not permissible to *eat*, for had the Hindu realised that the natives of the British Isles also had their ritual interdictions, the history of the association of the two peoples might have been very different from what in the event it has been. I refer to the fact, which is not generally recognised even by the British themselves, that with many Britishers the *horse* is an object of worship. So also, though to a lesser extent, is the *dog*. Though horseflesh is commonly eaten on parts of the continent of Europe the vast majority of Britishers would not knowingly eat it, nor do I think it an exaggeration to say that there are even

* 'Introduction to English Folklore' by Violet Alford (G. Bell & Sons Ltd., London, 12s. 6d. net).

those amongst them who would die rather than do so ; while what it must have meant to an Englishman or woman when in the past they found themselves confronted in China with a dish of delicately dressed *chow puppy*, I dare not allow myself to imagine.

The British cult of the horse is too well known to require any further exposition here, but as that of the dog is less generally recognised I may say that dog-worshippers will tell you that the dog is almost human (they would like to say 'divine', but dare not quite go to those lengths), and that the dog receives a sympathy and attention in the British Isles that is far in excess of that accorded to any but the most privileged child. I say this in no carping spirit, for I myself am extremely fond of dogs, which means that not only am I prepared to admit without shame that I have never yet failed to attribute to my dogs a depth of understanding that I know quite well they do not possess, and have known a grief as desolating when they have died as any I have experienced at the death of a human being outside my immediate family, but that I have all along been perfectly well aware that it is only necessary to spend an afternoon in any respectable zoo to discover that the near-humanity of dogs is shared by large numbers of other furry creatures.

I had come to India in spite of much that had happened to discourage the idea, in the full expectation that I was coming to a country of saints and sages. The

thought repelled me rather than otherwise because I felt that in such an atmosphere as this must surely produce, one would have a constant and gnawing sense of one's own inferiority. I did not of course realise that I should be most unlikely to recognise a saint if I met one, while as for a sage, apart from the fact that he might be expected to have a long white beard, for I had heard of Lao Tse as having one, I had only the very vaguest idea what was meant by the term.

For the first few years I was here I kept my eyes and ears well open for the saint and the sage, but all I saw was a large number of people going about their daily avocations very much as they did in other parts of the world, though with what appeared to be a good deal more acceptance of bad working conditions than they did elsewhere.

Quite early in my time in Calcutta I was asked by an elderly lady of our acquaintance if I would care to help her in the preparation of a life of the Lord Krishna. Since I knew nothing whatever of Lord Krishna at that time except his name I said 'no'. I should have refused her suggestion in any case, but the lady herself was so manifestly of the genus bluestocking and indeed was so like in every way, except that she was a Bengali, to one of my more eccentric cousins, that I made my refusal more abrupt and final than I should perhaps have done otherwise.

Soon after this a young man from East Bengal appeared in our flat. I no longer have any idea what brought him to us, but I do recall that he told me that

his main object in life was, and had been for some time past, to be able to walk on the surface of the water. This struck me as blasphemous until I reminded myself that what was blasphemous to someone born in Christendom had no such implications for a Hindu.

My husband and I were on terms of close friendship with a number of leading exponents of *hatha yoga* and in no time at all I had seen examples of many of the marvels, such as the stopping of the heart's action and the bending of an iron bar against the throat muscles, for which body-yoga is famous. But the exponents of these arts did not accord with my idea of saints or sages and there was nobody to tell me that the first thing that *hatha yoga* does, if properly pursued, is to put an end to that state which has so often been described in graphic fashion as 'butterflies in the stomach' and that this was a beginning of a process that would some day provide a fit habitation for the higher knowledge.

My husband and I had been married in the February of nineteen-thirty-three and in the late March of that year we went on a delayed honeymoon trip to the Kumaon Hills. While there it was arranged that we should pay a visit to the very ancient and sacred group of temples at Baijnath under the guidance of a local Brahmin. On the morning that had been fixed for the expedition, our Brahmin was resplendent in a brand-new yellow puggaree. 'Ah,' I said to myself, 'a sage at last. Should I not, since I am not only an

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

untouchable but a woman, remove myself from the possibility of contaminating this holy man by my presence both in the car by which we are to travel, but when we reach the temples themselves?' I enquired of my husband if he did not think it better that I should withdraw from the outing, but all he said in reply to my query was, 'Rubbish!' Later in the day I was to understand his ejaculation, for it transpired that my holy man was only celebrating the first day of *Phalgun* by means of his yellow puggaree and that, although he had lived within a very few miles of Baijnath all his life this was the first time he had ever visited the temples!

Later that same year we went to Delhi and while we were there the festival of Ram Lila took place. As we made our way towards the seats that had been reserved for us on the Ram Lila ground, we were approached by a seedy individual, a manifest tout, who surprised me very much by addressing me as 'mother'. This annoyed my husband exceedingly, for though I was not in my first youth the man looked as though he might be at least as old as I was. The form of address had its sting for me too, because in the English with which I was familiar, the appellation was never used between persons who were strange to one another unless they were both of a class of life where a familiarity of the kind was taken for granted and if the woman so addressed was what is known as 'motherly-looking'. Presently, however, it was to be explained to me that in India 'mother' is an honorific title and as such might be regarded as definitely 'holy'.

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

One of the things that had come nearest to maddening my father in connection with our cousin Ernest, was the latter's attitude to death. The time came when his elder brother, as the saying is, 'passed on'. From my father's point of view Ernest's way of receiving this news was nothing short of heartless, for, instead of exhibiting some degree of grief, and indeed it had always been taken for granted that he was very much attached to this brother, he told the rest of us that there was no need for any of us to feel in the least saddened because the dead man had merely, as he put it, 'gone into the next room'.

Ernest's attitude at this juncture was no doubt due to his having come to believe in the doctrine of re-birth, but like so many people who have experienced a conversion to a belief not generally held by those about them, he expected everyone else to be able to share in his awakening regardless of the fact that it was he and not they who had taken the steps that had led up to it.

One of the last things that this cousin had told me before he left England was that he had been on a visit to Bengal and that while there he had seen an authentic Royal Bengal tiger. He told me a good deal about this animal, what it had looked like, how it had moved and so on, but as he had been telling us just previously that he had been spending a good deal of time of late in the Gobi Desert I could not make out whether he thought we should take any of his statements seriously, especially as we knew for a fact that in the period to which they

related he had never been further from England than the coast of France.

Knowing my father I should fully have expected him to consider anyone who talked in this strain as, to put it plainly, *mad*, but curiously enough he did not. This was perhaps because he and Ernest had been at school together, first of all at the before-mentioned Madras College and later at Tonbridge, where Ernest had been among the senior boys while my father was in the lower classes. In any case, he watched Ernest's behaviour with what can only be described as a fascinated repugnance, tintured at intervals with sheer fury. This was particularly so when Ernest expatiated in his presence, as he frequently and unwisely did, on the subject of *karma*, a word which he pronounced in a markedly possessive way, as though he knew a great deal about it that we could not hope to do, which indeed was the case.

When I was at Adyar on my way out, being anxious to know whether I was correct in my surmise that Ernest had never been either to Bengal or the Gobi Desert, I asked my cousin, who was his niece, to set my doubts at rest on the point one way or the other. She hesitated for a moment before answering my question and then said very quietly and, as it seemed to me reproachfully, '*Not in the flesh.*' From this I supposed I was meant to infer that he had made the necessary journeys on what is known to Theosophy as the 'astral plane'.

Just before the First World War, my father, mother and I had gone to Dieppe for our summer holiday and

Ernest and his wife were staying in the neighbourhood of that French watering-place with relations of his but not of ours. One evening, my father and mother having made some excuse or other to get away from Ernest who by this time was to them a person to be avoided, I found myself alone with him in the large hotel salon. I too was anxious to be off, so that I did not encourage him to sit down or do so myself, with the result that we stood together in the middle of the floor. I have no idea what passed between us, though I can remember thinking that Ernest seemed likely to go on talking for ever. Meanwhile it appeared to me that his head, which was in any case notably tall, began to elongate itself till at last it nearly touched the ceiling. I cannot say that I was exactly alarmed by this phenomenon, because I was of course in a state of semi-hypnosis, but I felt a great desire to escape from his presence. Presently in fact, my parents, wondering what had become of me, reappeared : Ernest's head thereupon shrank back to normal and I was rescued.

Either that same night or later, I went with my parents to the casino, where I proceeded to lose a sum of thirty-five francs. The franc in those days was worth tenpence in English money and thirty shillings or so was more than I, at the age of eighteen, could afford to lose. I therefore took a mental vow then and there that I would never gamble at the roulette-table again. No sooner had I done this than Ernest appeared at my side and for the next twenty or thirty turns of the roulette-wheel foretold every single number that turned

up ! I remarked laughingly that I could not understand how it was that with such astounding gifts of prophecy as he had just displayed, he had not made a fortune on the turf, but he rebuked me, saying : 'These things must never be done for monetary reward.'

After I had been some years in Calcutta I had the experience of having at one and the same time in our drawing-room in Middleton Street, two people who were totally unconnected with one another, but who had both separately witnessed the Indian rope trick. One was an English-woman and a missionary, the other a Bengali doctor. In both cases their testimony was therefore unimpeachable. They described what they had seen in full detail, comparing notes as they went along and their descriptions tallied in every particular except that when the boy had reached the top of the rope one of them had seen his body fall apart, while the other had not.

When I heard this I recalled an occasion in London when I had seen something which in its less sensational way seemed to me just as remarkable as the celebrated rope trick. This took place at that delightful pleasure ground which used to be such a feature of London life, the Earl's Court Exhibition.* I was there with my parents and we came to a side-show which consisted of conjuring by a young Indian who possessed the added attraction from the point of view of a sensation-loving public of being one of twins of the kind that are known as 'Siamese', that is to say who are joined together at some part of their bodies.

The word 'Indian' was of course enough for my father and he immediately took tickets for the session which we were warned was already half way through. The hall in which this show was being held measured at least one-hundred-and-twenty feet from one end to the other and as it was packed to the doors we were obliged to stand right at the back. I can remember nothing that took place while we were there except that the show was very much above the average in skill and interest and that at one point the young Indian walked the whole length of the hall and asked if someone could lend him a handkerchief. I gave him mine. He took it with a courteous inclination and went back to the platform. The next thing that happened was that we saw him lift his hand, *throw* the handkerchief in our direction and almost simultaneously it was back in my hand. I was greatly impressed, but less so than I should have been if the conjuror had been anybody but an Indian, for India was well known to be the home of all that was most wonderful in the way of magic.

Needless to say we waited till the show was over to have a word with the performer. He turned out to be a very charming young man and we only thought it a pity that he should be making his living in this way, the more so as he was trading to some extent on his physical peculiarity. Both as lover of all things Indian and scientific investigator my father was greatly interested when the young man opened his upper garment and showed us his 'twin', which consisted of a rudimentary head that extruded from his chest.

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

Having examined this curiosity we thanked him for his excellent display of conjuring, bade him good-night and took ourselves off.

I have seen some very skilful conjuring since I have been in India, including that of the famous Professor Das, who could instantly produce from the folds of his *dhoti* any coin which the ingenuity of the members of his audience could think of. But never have I seen anything more impressive than the throwing of that handkerchief and its return to my hand, for it is impossible, if one comes to think of it, to *throw* a handkerchief even a yard or two, let alone the length of a hall.

Very early in my time in Calcutta, certainly within the first few weeks, I made up my mind that never again would I leave India unless for some reason or other I was forced to do so.

Odd as this may seem this had nothing to do with the fact that I was about to marry a man who, ever since he had come out from England twelve years before had never taken 'home' leave, or indeed gone further from Indian shores than Burma. There were two reasons for my decision, both strictly personal. The first was that I saw very clearly that unless one settled down and ceased to hanker after going 'home' as England was called, one could never hope for more than a superficial relationship with the people of the land. The second was that, even then, I was beginning to feel that there

were things to be learnt and mysteries to be probed that did not exist elsewhere.

An event which may have contributed to some extent to this decision was that a friend of my husband's, a railwayman, who spent a great deal of time with us during my first weeks, suddenly said one night at dinner, just as though he were telling us that he was going away for the weekend : 'Well, its not much longer now. I'm off on Monday.' This was his way of announcing to me that, having retired from the service of what was then the East Indian Railway, he was leaving India for good.

I have often heard this kind of announcement since then, but never with more consternation, for this was one of those rare individuals who took the kind of interest in India that my father would have done if fate had ever brought him to these shores. He had been on leave prior to retirement and this had enabled him to drive us about the countryside round Calcutta. Through him we had visited neighbouring villages which included a settlement near Barrackpore of what I was told were called 'bow and arrow men', that is to say of primitives from the Ranchi plateau and an encampment of jackal-catching gipsies at Dum Dum. He left on the Monday after he had dined with us for the last time and, as has been the case with only too many of our European acquaintance in India we have neither seen or heard of him again.

Out of this all too short experience of what might have proved a very rewarding friendship, there arose in

me an imaginative conception of what it must mean to an Indian national to say goodbye to English people to whom he has given his friendship, or even love. It seemed to me astonishing that no one appeared to have realised, with the possible exception of a novelist here and there, how large a part this might have played in bringing about the enmities that had arisen between the peoples of India and those of the British Isles. Here was I, an Englishwoman, feeling the parting from a fellow-countryman whom I had only known for a few days. How terribly much more must such a wrench be felt by an Indian who had managed with heaven knew what of emotional wear and tear, to get behind the well-known stand-offishness of some particular Briton.

Here, perhaps, is something that the Indian has never fully realised. The Englishman, and now-a-days also to a great extent the Englishwoman, is trained from his or her earliest years to endure the violent assault on the emotions which is involved in parting from those they love. There are many schools in England where children are taken as boarders at an age when they would be far better at their mothers' knees. Were this not so, one of the worst aspects of British colonialism would have been avoided, for it was the knowledge inherent in the British in India that all their children over a certain age would have to be sent back to the United Kingdom that caused the women to feel a dislike for India that could not be accounted for in any other way. In fact the normal egotism of maternity was driven to almost insane lengths by this fear, and as though to underline

what it would mean to lose their children just as they were becoming companionable, the children themselves were by some strange alchemy, or possibly only because of the care that was expended on them, lovelier than most of their kind. It may have been the preponderance of Scottish blood amongst the Europeans in Calcutta, but a noticeably high proportion of their children were pure blonds. It will be remembered that the quarrel between Oberon and Titania in Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer's Night's Dream' was over the possession of a little Indian boy and I often thought, seeing the groups of European children playing in the Cathedral grounds in Calcutta that, exquisite as Indian children almost always are, Titania could have exchanged her little Indian boy quite happily for one of those fair-haired, blue-eyed, to use the words of St Gregory, 'angels, not Angles'.

In the early days of the British occupation, it had of course been fear of the climate and what it was supposed to be capable of doing to the health that had brought about this state of things, for those were the days when nothing at all was known about the causes, let alone the cures, of tropical or indeed any other diseases and the death-rate amongst children was even more horrifying than it was amongst their elders. As recently as the year nineteen-thirty-two, when I came out, this fear was so far from having died that the knowledge of what life in India must have been like before the days of Pasteur seemed to be ground into everybody's bones. This was not to be wondered at

when it is remembered that as recently as thirty years ago, typhoid was not only still rife, but nearly one hundred per cent fatal: so, in the absence of an inoculation which had only recently been proved effective, was cholera. Bengal was mercifully free from bubonic plague, but smallpox had a way of attacking the European in spite of vaccination: leprosy, which had not yet come to be known to the general run of humanity as 'Hansen's disease', was still looked upon with all the horror that it had evoked in Europe in the Middle Ages, while tuberculosis was rampant and, in the conditions of slumdom which even then prevailed, appeared to be increasing by leaps and bounds. Meanwhile, all sorts of abdominal infections which were grouped together for politeness's sake under the heading 'tummy trouble', took their toll if not of life, of the enjoyment of it: malaria was endemic, at times fatal, always debilitating, and that which the mosquito could do towards destroying the human frame by slow degrees was frequently before our eyes in the form of the hideously swollen limbs of those afflicted with the so aptly-named elephantiasis.

It has taken less than twenty-five years of modern medicine to rob most of these diseases of the greater part of their terrors, but for a long time after I came to India I used to get up in the morning dreading that I should be told before the day had well begun that I should be called upon to take either one of our servants, or somebody they knew, to one or other of the Calcutta hospitals. And here, as it seems to me, was one of the

root-causes of the corruption of which we are always hearing so much, because even in those days, when the size of the population of Calcutta was still within reason, the hospital accomodation was so utterly inadequate to its needs that no Indian below a certain standard of subsistence had hope of admission as an in-patient unless he was sponsored by a European or happened to have incredibly good luck in his choice of the moment to be ill.

The shortage of hospital accomodation was brought home to me with peculiar poignancy very soon after I arrived in India by an episode in which I became personally involved.

My husband had been called upon to conduct an appeal on behalf of a young detenue who, after some months in a provincial prison had suddenly run amuck and killed a warder. The circumstances of the boy's crime were such as to suggest a sudden attack of insanity and that was the plea my husband took. In due course permission was granted by the authorities for the prisoner to be brought to Calcutta for examination by a psychiatrist, but while his arrival was awaited news came that he had been hanged.

This was of course a gross miscarriage of justice and my husband was correspondingly angry. He made an immediate representation to the Viceroy, to be referred back to the then Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson. The Governor was every bit as angry and disgusted as

was my husband and by way of such redress as he could offer to the boy's parents he undertook to educate and place in life a brother of their dead son.

This second lad was anxious to be given some kind of industrial training and he was presently entered as a student at the Textile Institute at Serampore. After he had been there some time my husband and I went to see how he was getting on and were told that he was a very satisfactory pupil and a good athlete. In proof of this latter statement the boy insisted on rowing us across the river Hooghly and back. It seemed to me that to row single-handed across so wide a stretch of water, especially as the tide was flowing strongly at the time, was much too great a physical effort for a young fellow who had probably not yet reached his full strength and I made a strong protest against his project but it went unheeded. Almost exactly a week later we were rung up with the news that the boy was lying in the local hospital with what had been diagnosed as acute T. B. and would we please arrange for him to be moved elsewhere without delay.

There followed a period while the boy was in the T.B. ward of Calcutta's Medical College Hospital, but again he had to be moved. He was threatening suicide.

This time it was found impossible to get admission for him anywhere in northern India, so that he had to be sent to a sanatorium in the South. Always at the Governor's expense the boy was despatched in a reserved carriage and in the care of a nurse on his long journey to what we hoped against hope might prove a cure. He

was there for another period of months when we had a telegram to say that he was dying and that he wished to go to his home. The sanatorium was a Christian institution and he was a Buddhist. This meant a journey from South India to Chittagong, for the boy belonged to that place.

One evening soon after this, my husband being away from Calcutta on a case, I was rung up from Sealdah Station with the news that the boy had arrived that day and was wanting to see me. I set off at once and found the patient lying on the departure platform for Chittagong. If I had not been told who he was I should not have known him. Only his splendid unsullied teeth were recognisable as belonging to the boy I had seen last in the T.B. ward at the Medical College Hospital. I was so new to India then that I could not endure the thought of a dying fellow creature being exposed to the discomfort of spending one of his last nights on earth amid the noises and smells of a railways terminus, so, after a few almost intolerably moving minutes with the boy, who could no longer speak I set off to try to get shelter for him for the night in a nearby hospital.

This was my first attempt to win over a doctor on duty in an emergency ward to an action that seemed to me to be dictated by common humanity. But beg as I might that the boy should be allowed to lie on the floor in the out-patients' department, anywhere, so long as he was under a roof, the doctor was adamant. It was against regulations.

I debated whether I could take the boy back to our

compound for the night, but should I be justified in exposing our servants to what might be an infective case of that most dreaded of all complaints, T.B. In any case they would be very frightened and supposing he died before we could get him away. I was extremely unhappy about the whole situation but I comforted myself with the reflection that it was perhaps better not to move the poor fellow any more than was absolutely necessary. I went back to the station. Those of his family who were with the boy had taken it for granted that I should be unsuccessful in my efforts at the hospital and with the never-failing resignation of the Indian peasant had already bedded themselves down for the night.

We learned later that the boy had been got to his home and that he had died surrounded by his family within three days of his return to Chittagong.

The social life of Calcutta as it existed for the European when I first arrived in India and that was still in operation up to the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, seemed to me to be of a frivolity that almost defied description. As in all communities where the indigenous population is being governed by an alien power it was a seriously unbalanced society in the sense that more or less all its members were between the ages of twenty-three and fifty-five. It was true that there were the children up to eight or so, but then came a gap not to be filled in where the girls were concerned

until they had left school at eighteen; in that of the boys either never, or when in very rare instances they came back to some post, at the end of their school or university days, as the case might be. The absence of youthful enthusiasm and of the creativeness that goes with it was thus very marked. There were almost no old people at all, nor, which was even more unfortunate, none of the retired middle-aged men such as are to be found in most European countries, with the leisure to devote themselves to constructive social work. The exceptions were the missionaries, many of whom were destined to end their lives in India. This meant that such organisations as existed for the betterment of the lives of the poorer sections of the population had an inevitably Christian slant and were dependent for their always slender funds upon people who, because they had no real stake in the country and were certainly not going to end their days there, were not nearly generous enough.

The lack of young people and the preponderance of overburdened business and professional men, made for a far from interesting society. Nevertheless, a great many people enjoyed being part of it, or thought they did, and that was scarcely surprising because they almost all had more money to spend than they had before, or had thought to have, and were associating with people whom they were not very likely to have met had they remained in the British Isles.

Because many of the younger wives had little or no idea how to behave in the curious world in which they found themselves, they had appointed a kind of

arbitrix of elegance in the form of an old lady, the wife of a prominent barrister, who was supposed to know exactly how things should be done and how young women in particular should comport themselves while doing them. Why she should have been elected to this position unless it was that she accorded with the popular conception of a Victorian dowager, it is difficult to say. She was most truly Victorian, however, in so far as she was fifty or more years behind the times.

One of the ways in which this old woman had managed to enslave the feminine part of the British community was in the matter of the social call. Being a lawyer's wife she was considered to be particularly well-versed in everything that related to the duties of the womenfolk of the professional man, and we were assured by her that nothing could be more disastrous than that the lawyer's or doctor's wife, or if he was without one, he himself, should fail to deposit the right number of visiting cards on the people who mattered to them professionally. The number of cards that should be left in each individual case was both very important and highly intricate: so was the question of who should be the first to call upon whom, those who came from out of town being in a different position in this regard to those who were already in residence. But even the husbands had fallen under her spell, so that it had become an extra source of worry to them lest their wives should do the wrong thing when it came to calling on bachelors, widowers, or the temporary lone man known as the 'grass-widower'. Almost insoluble

problems arose in the respect of the number of cards that they should receive in each case, but one thing was blessedly certain, the cards had to go *by post*.

Apart from the fact that, since it can never be foreseen who will fall ill or need to file a suit, the people who matter to a professional man are necessarily legion, it has always seemed to me a very poor compliment to his skill in his particular line that a visiting card should be thought of as capable of influencing the mind of its recipient to the extent of affecting his professional earnings. In fact, of course, they were a form of advertisement, though all the information they had room for was that the persons whose names were inscribed on them were to be found at a particular address. This being so, it would surely have been more honest, a great deal more sensible and perhaps even cheaper, since a considerable expenditure of petrol was involved in their delivery, if, instead of pretending, as we all did, that the cards had a social significance, we had been permitted to insert an advertisement in the press, giving the same amount of information as they were designed to convey. But no : doctors and lawyers might not advertise, at least not openly or of set purpose. For this, and other reasons, the social life of Calcutta, as it affected the Europeans, was not very far from being hard work, and is why the little box for the receipt of visiting cards which hung at everybody's door or gate, had come to bear the words, 'Not at Home'. Some of our less sophisticated Indian friends found these little boxes with their unfriendly inscription a

source of great bewilderment and were not infrequently dissuaded from attempting to see us by the sight of ours hanging forbiddingly at our gate; but when it was explained to them that nobody would have been more put about than the card-dropper herself had she been admitted to every house at which she called, they saw the point of what had seemed to them at first to be just another example and a singularly harsh one, of British stand-offishness.

Another of the things that was an intolerable interruption to the smooth functioning of the domestic round, was the so-called 'chit'. This means of communication was a hangover from the time when household servants could be had for what amounted to pocket-money and their keep and when the postal services were as yet unborn or still in their infancy. It would not have been so bad if the chits had not been delivered as they very naturally were, at the recognised European mealtimes, or if it had not been understood that they should be answered at once. It was nothing to have to get up from the table three or four times during lunch or dinner to answer an invitation or to write a recommendation for employment from what was often a total stranger. This latter, if I did not know the applicant, I always refused to do, but even so I have known what it was to receive as many as twenty-four of the odious little notes in the span of a single day.

I believe it was this chit habit more than anything else, because of its power, which was even greater than that of the telephone, for speeding things up, that led

to the excess of entertaining that was such a feature of Calcutta life in the pre-war years. Food and drink were both very cheap; wages were low and the *Mugh* cook, whom I venture to assert is the best in the world, could be counted upon to send up an admirable meal. In the first ten days after my arrival in Calcutta, we dined in a different house every night. My husband-to-be had been for the previous ten years or so, a popular bachelor and, because of his gifts as a raconteur, a treasured guest: it was therefore entirely to be expected that his friends should evince a good deal of curiosity regarding the woman he was going to marry. I was on view, there was no doubt about that. But I was fresh from a land where the formal dinner party had become a rare event and I found this continuous stream of hospitality a form of penance.

In some respects I am a meticulous keeper of domestic records and from these I find that in the first month after our marriage my husband and I never had a meal alone. This would not have mattered so much, especially from my point of view, for I am quite fairly gregarious, if it had not been for the way in which it interfered with our due amount of rest. The accepted hour for the breaking-up of a European dinner-party was eleven o'clock, but as all public entertainments such as cinemas and concerts started at the earliest at nine, it was quite usual for us not to get to bed until the early hours of the following morning. This again would have been of small account if we could have hoped to sleep off our fatigue; but Calcutta was given to early

rising. Very many of a lawyer's consultations were timed to take place at seven or eight in the morning, as were a large number of committee meetings, so that when we had been out the previous night we were lucky if we had managed to snatch more than four hour's sleep. That this was recognised as being a bad thing was shown by the fact that many of the more senior civil servants and commercial magnates had established a rule for themselves that they would never accept or give an invitation for the middle of the week. But this was not possible where the professional man was concerned, for both the doctor and the lawyer is without set hours of either work or leisure.

Another of the wearing aspects of the dinner party, at any rate from the point of view of the host and hostess, was the question who should be put to sit where. If you knew how to get hold of it you could refer to an official table of precedence which gave the rating of every conceivable European male from the Viceroy upwards—the Metropolitan of India, Burma and Ceylon ranked highest of all—down to the humblest subaltern or the most junior civil servant. Even so, difficulties were apt to arise when it came to someone holding two ranks, or when two of one's guests seemed for some reason or another to be equal. Moreover, in case one should be inclined to take the matter too lightly there was the awful story, which was always going the rounds, of how a certain *burra memsahib*, the wife of either a

prominent business man, or official or a high-up civil servant, had taken one look at the arrangement of the table at which she had just sat down and, finding that she had not been placed where she thought she ought to be, had got up without a word and swept out of the room.

No one knew who this *burra memsahib* had been or in what house the episode had taken place and what made it all so much worse was the finality of the thing. It was like one of those short stories where, just as you have begun to get interested in the characters it all peters out and you are left wondering if any of them are going to survive their troubles. What had her husband done, for instance? Had he followed her out of the room or just gone on eating his dinner as though nothing had happened? And what had been done about the place at the table which had been left vacant by her departure? Nobody knew the answer to these questions and for the reason, as I strongly suspect, that the narrative will have been an invention on the part of our arbitrix to keep us in further subjection!

Another way in which we were kept well under was in the matter of *hats* and *gloves*. Hats were no longer worn except by regular church-goers and even then some kind of scarf arrangement was often made to do duty in their place, while kid or suede gloves were penitential wear in any but the very coldest months; nevertheless both were said to be absolutely *de rigueur* at luncheon at Government House or Belvedere, while, as my husband had prophesied, *long* white gloves which

if necessary must reach above the elbow, were a *sine qua non* at all evening functions at both places. Failure to abide by both these rules we were told was to incur the risk of being asked to leave. Apparently you could worm your way in without these appurtenances, but as soon as you were spotted by a private secretary or A.D.C., out you would have to go. Nobody had ever been present when such a fearful humiliation had descended on one of our number because the situation itself had never occurred. This time I cannot help thinking that it was the drapers who had had something to do with setting the fable in motion. Our arbitrix could not have been responsible for it for she could hardly have imagined that any pupil of hers could be guilty of so grave an example of *less majeste*. In case I should be excused of exaggerating in telling this story I would add that I was myself present on an occasion when a visitor from what was known as 'out-station' who had accepted an invitation to lunch at Government House without being aware of this ukase, was lent a hat by no less a person than one of the Governor's own daughters. But those were in the last days of the British occupation when the Governor and his wife had descended to the level of ordinary mortals.

It will I think have been these things and the fact that they were almost always based on the motive of self-aggrandisement that caused a high proportion of the Europeans in Calcutta to drink too much. They were driving themselves beyond the point at which the human frame can function without artificial stimulation

in a climate which in any case tried them to the utmost. They will also have served to keep alive the pernicious system known as 'long leave', for it was only by means of a prolonged rest in a temperate climate that the ravages caused by the lives they were leading could hope to be repaired.

The fears that had beset me on the outward voyage that I should find myself in a drinking set had not been realised in so far as my husband was always to remain firm in his refusal to provide either cocktails or what was known as 'Scotch' at any of our dinner parties or in our house at all. He happened to be an authority on wines and so great was his detestation of whisky that he was in the habit of alluding to it as 'fire-water'.

Calcutta had meant my introduction to the cocktail party, for although we never gave one ourselves we were quite often asked to other people's. I had never been to one before, but they were exactly as I had always been led to expect they would be. There was the standing about, or if one was seated, the craning upwards in order to carry on a conversation with someone who had perforce to remain standing, or who did so because he wanted to be ready to slip away. Most of the guests seemed to be present for the sole purpose of consuming as much alcohol as they could get hold of in a given time, so that there was nothing in the way of conversation but inattentive chat and the gazing over one's shoulder meanwhile to see if someone more rewarding were not in the offing.

Though I was never I thank my stars destined to

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

be present at one, I have heard descriptions of cocktail parties that were nothing more nor less than orgies of the damned, where everybody got drunk, or to use the more polite euphuism, 'tight', where they went on drinking till midnight or later: where those who drove home at the end of it all were in no condition to sit at the wheel of a car and where the rest were left, wet or fine, to get themselves back to their homes on foot.

PART THREE

In one of his last letters to me before I left England, my husband had said he hoped I would take an interest in a charity called 'The Society for the Protection of Children in India', of which he had for some years past been honorary counsel, and very soon after my arrival in Calcutta I found myself roped in as a member of the executive committee of this body.

The Society had been founded in the late 'nineties of last century, but it had done little more than provide shelter for something like a hundred children at a time until the Bengal Children Act was passed in the year 1922. The passing of this Act might have been a big thing for Bengal, especially where the beggar child was concerned, but for a number of reasons, most of them connected with the lack of suitable accommodation for the children who were destined to be dealt with under its provisions, it had only been found possible to bring the Act into operation in the city of Calcutta and then only in respect of a few of its sections. However, it had been entirely due to the zeal of the then secretary of the Society that the Act had come into being at all and when I joined the committee the Society had begun for the first time, so to speak, to be noticed.

The S. P. C. I., as it is commonly called, was housed at that time in two not very large rooms in an old house in the centre of the town and was manned by a staff

consisting of a secretary, a typist, two enquiry officers and a peon. Funds were chronically insufficient and everyone connected with the Society was resentful because the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, known as the S.P.C.A., and constantly confused with us, received far greater support from the public than we did. I was to find that the phrase 'buffaloes versus babies' was a kind of satirical slogan often to be heard on the lips of the Society's staff.

We did not exist for the sole purpose of looking after the welfare of babies: there were other bodies that concerned themselves with that. Our scope, as laid down in our articles of association was in fact very wide indeed, being no less than the protection of children of every race, creed and caste from earliest infancy till the Indian age of majority, which is eighteen, throughout the length and breadth of India.

I was to be associated with the S. P. C. I., first as a committee member, then as honorary general secretary, for over seven years and I have always since regarded that period as in many ways the most valuable I have ever spent, for it brought me in touch with the lives of the people of India more intimately than could have come about in any other way. *

As our income from all sources hardly ever rose above half a lakh of rupees a year, we could do little more than nibble at our various activities, but when we nibbled we did it properly and more children and young persons than might be imagined have had reason to thank the Society for having saved them from every

sort of wretchedness and for having set them on their feet thereafter. Of cruelty of the kinds with which we are only too familiar in the West, India on the whole has little to show, but the various forms of neglect and exploitation arising out of extreme poverty on the one hand and of the greed of man on the other, were very prevalent. People were often to ask me whether I did not find the work of child protection too hard to bear, but it was not the work itself that saddened us, for the rescue of any child in need of protection was matter for rejoicing, so much as the thought of what we could have accomplished if only we had had the money.

It may perhaps be considered as having been good luck for the Society that I had done no work of this kind before, because I can imagine that if I had known what it was to try to cope with the problems that were our daily lot with a background such as would have been mine had I done similar work in a country which was equipped with even relatively adequate social services, I should have lost heart within a month or two. We had no home of our own for the reception of our rescued children and were therefore dependent on the hospitality of other charitable bodies. Apart from the purely scholastic establishments these were pitifully few and because they were so few they were nearly always full to the doors. This meant that we could do very much less than we could have wished towards reducing the number of destitute children in the city, for when we had succeeded in rescuing one of them we had

nowhere of our own to put him while we were arranging for his permanent accommodation.

In the very early days of my secretaryship, when I was still heroically determined never to say 'no' in the case of the needs of a destitute or ill-treated child, I undertook at the behest of the Calcutta police to take charge of no less than ten destitute children at one fell swoop. These were not beggars in the ordinary sense of the word, but were some of the inmates of a maternity home of the kind which in Victorian times in England was known as a 'baby farm' who were sent out as a group to beg from the public on behalf of the home. These children were of both sexes and ranged in age from extreme infancy to eight or nine years old. Our task was a formidable one, but we succeeded in getting the infants admitted to a hospital ward and the older children taken in by various orphanages before the day was out.

There followed a legal battle which lasted for ten months and that ended with the appointment of guardians by the High Court for those of the children who had survived, for several of the smaller ones had been rapt away by their mothers in the interval, had been taken back to the baby-farm and had died of cholera.

As can easily be imagined, the difficulty of protecting children in the absence of a hostel or clearing-house where they could be looked after while their ultimate fate was in the balance, was very nearly insurmountable and this was not the only occasion upon

which we lost the custody of children in this way. We had started a building fund and while I was secretary we succeeded in buying a fine piece of land at Sodepore on which to build a well-planned hostel, but it was not until we were put in charge of a home for the accomodation of children left orphans by the famine of 1943 that we came to possess anything in the nature of a clearing-house of our own.

It goes without saying that then, as now, the Calcutta hospitals were at their wits' ends to know how to accomodate the sick who clamoured for admission to their wards, so that a sick child was a terrible difficulty for us. We were once advised by telegram that a beggar boy of ten whom we had known of as being a sufferer from a severe form of hydrocephalus (water on the brain), was due to arrive at Sealdah station from Chittagong that same night. The news had arrived too late for us to be able to make an arrangement for even the most temporary admission of the child to a home or hospital, so that there was nothing for it but that he should spend the night in our flat. He was fully intelligent but quite helpless and as his head was nearly as long as his dreadfully shrunken body, his very appearance until one got used to it, was almost too horrifying to be borne. This child had been hired out for begging purposes at the standard rate for boys of ten rupees a month and it was only because the magistrate before whom the child had been produced knew of the

existence of the Society that it had been possible for him to be taken away from the people who were living on his earnings. This was a case that no ordinary children's home or orphanage could be got to touch and if we had not been able to gain admission for him to a newly-established children's hospital, he would presumably have had to remain in our flat for the rest of his days. As it was he lay in his cot in that hospital till his death some years later. But where else, I asked myself, would it be necessary for an ordinary children's hospital to be asked to look after an incurable bedridden patient for an indefinite number of years for a monthly payment so small that it can hardly have done more than pay for his food?

We were not so successful with another beggar. This time we were rung up by a member of the public who said that he was appalled by something he had just seen: a crippled boy of about fourteen was *rolling* down the length of one of Calcutta main thoroughfares, begging as he went. Would we please send someone to deal with the matter at once. As always in such cases I sent one of our enquiry officers to verify the truth of what we had just been told, though with little hope that we could do anything about it. He was gone some time and I had begun to think that he had been unable to get track of the incident when he arrived back not only with the information that he had watched the boy's progress down the street for a full hour during which time the passersby had parted with sums amounting in the aggregate to over three rupees, but with the boy himself.

It took no more than a glance to see that this was one of those examples of that crippling of a child for begging purposes which was well-known to be taking place, but the perpetrators of which had never yet been caught red-handed. It was plain that at some time or other, probably very early in his life, for he either could not or would not tell us anything about it, the boy's legs had been broken at several points and either not been set at all, or set wrongly, so that now they looked like nothing so much as a pair of stag's antlers and he was totally unable to walk or even to stand. This was no congenital deformity, nor could it have been the result of an accident. Apart from the state of his legs the lad was unusually well-built. He was also most intelligent and good-mannered. It seemed to me evident that he sprang from superior stock and that he had either been kidnapped by the promoters of this infamous traffic in human flesh, or had, as only too often happens, fallen into the hands of villains through destitution and thereafter either been hired out or sold to a regular beggar gang. So strong an impression of gentleness and refinement did he give that I felt it only right to ask his permission before photographing him. This he readily gave. Later, when I showed the snap-shots to various medical friends they all agreed that the crippling must have been intentional.

One of our main problems at that time, as I have said, was what to do with the child we had rescued. This existed in an aggravated form when the rescue took place from the streets and was almost insoluble when he had

learned to beg. It will no doubt be thought that all children brought in from the streets must be beggars, but this was far from being so. Even during my few years with the S.P.C.I. quite a number of children were found on the pavements of Calcutta who had not yet become beggars. For instance, there was the case of the respectable middle-class housewife left a widow and fallen on evil times, who had herself brought to the office in a rickshaw with her two little sons. All three of them had been camping on the pavement of one of the lesser streets in the northern part of the town and the neighbouring householders had been providing them with food. Now, however, the mother had contracted cholera and, knowing herself dying, had had herself brought to the society in the hope that we would take charge of her children.

Then again, there was the small boy who was found sitting on a pavement by the dead body of his mother. He was too young to be able to give us any account of himself, so that we never knew who he was, nor did we ever find out his name. In both these cases we assumed custody of the children and brought them up, but our boy with the crippled legs presented a different problem altogether. He had not only become a beggar, but was an outstandingly successful one and very few of the institutions in which we cared to place our children were prepared to take charge of any child over the age of seven who had been taught to beg. The habit, they said, was fixed irrevocably by the time a child was seven years old and after that it became a case of once a beggar

always a beggar. Indeed one of the very best orphanages with which we were in touch had a strict rule against admitting any child over that age who had been rescued from the streets. In spite of this, so good was the impression that our crippled boy had made on all of us and so tractable did he seem, that I had him asked if he would not like to be sent to a home where he could be taught a trade. His reply was, 'I should like nothing better, but I have eight people dependent on me. If I were to accept your offer what would become of them?' This left us with no choice but to return the boy to the streets. There was no law against begging as such and if what the boy said was true, any attempt on our part to deflect him from what he considered his duty would be sure to prove a failure. If, on the other hand, he was lying, as seemed most probable, his assertion was only one more proof that he was in the hands of an organised beggar gang.

The whole question of what is generally known in India as the beggar 'problem' was just then receiving special attention from the Calcutta branch of the Rotary Club which had formed a sub-committee to enquire into the conditions giving rise to the begging in the city and to try to obtain some kind of estimate of the number of beggars involved. As honorary general secretary of the S.P.C.I. I was an ex-officio member of this sub-committee and so it came about that I learned of the existence of at least ten powerful beggar gangs that were known to be operating in Calcutta at this time. The ordinary and often apparently independent beggar

was in fact in most cases what might be called an employee of one or other of these gangs and it was quite a common sight in those days for a child or disabled beggar to be seen handing over his takings to a man who was sent round specially for the purpose. We of the Society did not of course know so much about the problem as a whole as did the police, but I was able to report several examples of it that were known to us but not to them. One of these had in fact just then come to our notice through one of the S.P.C.I. committee members, who could actually see from the roof of his house what was manifestly a 'school' for pickpockets where, quite in the manner of *Oliver Twist*, the youthful students were being trained to snatch the spectacles, the note-case and the fountain pen from the pocket of the punjabi or coat of his predestined victim. In my enthusiasm I had been anxious to go after these people, but wiser counsels had prevailed. A professional beggar can be dangerous enough, but when it comes to begging-cum-crime, a philanthropic society with what are at all times inadequate funds cannot hope to suppress, or even to aid in the suppression of a gang with the effrontery to conduct its nefarious activities in full view of its law-abiding neighbours.

There remained the types of juvenile beggar whom, given the necessary funds we could have rescued and cared for under the provisions of such of the clauses of the Bengal Children Act as were then in operation and that dealt with their particular predicaments. Of these

was the purely destitute child who as often as not had been punished for some quite trivial fault, had wandered away from home, got into a train, been carried away from his own part of the country and, being unable to give any clear indication thereafter of where he came from and even in many cases the very name of his village was, in plain language, *lost*.

Having arrived in Calcutta, the lost child usually began sooner or later to indulge in petty theft in order to live and so found himself committed to the Reformatory until the age of sixteen. For him, since it had never in India been possible to establish the system whereby first offenders can be placed on probation and boarded out in suitable homes, we could do little or nothing until he had been sentenced under the Reformatory Act, when we did on occasion apply for the licencing to us of some of the younger ones.

As I was an ex-officio member of the governing body of our local Reformatory the fate of the 'lost' child had become a matter of special moment to me, for I had found that only too many of the existing inmates had been committed to what was in all essentials a jail for crimes so trivial that in a community where the problem of the homeless child was receiving the attention it should, would have been overlooked. In order to keep a boy from an incarceration which, if he were no more than seven or eight at the time of his committal to the Reformatory might last for as much as eight or nine years, one of our enquiry officers was deputed to attend all the sittings of the Children's Court. Thus it was that

we were one day asked by the Children's Court Magistrate if we could do anything to help a boy of about twelve or thirteen who was up before him for a theft from the home in which he had been lodged by the police, of a sum of four annas.

The case of this particular boy presented a peculiar difficulty in that he spoke a language which no one could understand or identify. He talked a great deal because he was obviously and quite reasonably excited. He seemed very intelligent and was full of gesture, so much so, that I thought he might be a dancer and he repeated again and again a word that sounded like Bombay. Bearing in mind that one of the inmates of the Reformatory at that moment had been sentenced to eight years within its walls for having stolen *a slice of fish*, I took special trouble over this boy and during the first hours he was in our office we called in as many as ten or twelve speakers of different Indian languages in the hope of being able to find out what he was trying to say to us, but without success.

At last, so eloquent were his gestures, though of what we could not make out, that I thought it possible they might be able to read them, at least to some extent, at the Deaf and Dumb School.* Accordingly we sent him there, but he was back in no time at all with a message to say that the reason why we could not understand what he was saying was that he was almost wholly *deaf* and that such speech as he had must of necessity be incomprehensible to anyone outside his immediate family and friends.

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

The question was now what to do. The boy's reiteration of a sound that suggested the word Bombay made it possible that he came from that city, we therefore made arrangements to send him there in the charge of one of our enquiry officers in the hope that he would be able to find his home. Arrived in Bombay he was driven all over the town, but he appeared to recognise nothing. There seemed no point in bringing him back to Calcutta, our sister society in Bombay was therefore asked to take charge of him until such time as he could be accommodated in an institution for the deaf and dumb in that city.

Now comes the strange part of the story.

While he was awaiting admission to the local deaf and dumb school, measles broke out in it and it was placed in quarantine. This meant a delay of some three weeks or so. The time had nearly passed and in fact he was to be admitted the next day, when who should be brought in from the streets but a boy from *his very own village* which, being in the north-eastern part of the United Provinces, cannot have been less than twelve hundred miles from Bombay.

For once in a way a miracle had occurred and our boy was no longer among the lost. As it turned out his parents were quite substantial enough people to be able to go to Bombay to take him home at once. He had done what these children nearly always do, got on a train and then been too frightened to get off again.

It will, I believe, be matter for surprise to those

who have had no experience of the protective aspects of child welfare, to learn that the child who was being exploited for begging purposes, in other words, dragging out an existence on the streets of the city in the charge of a grown person, or, where the latter was himself blind or otherwise disabled, in charge of that person in his turn, is one of the most difficult of all children to protect. The difficulty arises out of the fact that in almost all such cases the people who are exploiting it claim to be its parents. In the criminal courts this claim is apt to be taken at its face value and as in any case this type of court is not competent to issue an order regarding the *guardianship* of a minor. The child is likely in the end, even where the so-called parents have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment for exposing it in a manner likely to cause injury to its health, to be back where it started, that is to say in the hands of its exploiters and once more begging in the streets.

After I had had experience of a number of these cases I came to the conclusion that the only way in which the victims could be rendered safe, not only during what might be called the period of rescue, but thereafter, was to make an application for guardianship under the Guardians and Wards Act. As an application under this Act can only be filed in the higher, that is to say, the civil courts, it is liable to be expensive, but because the courts competent to hear suits of this kind are not only empowered to make a thorough investigation into a child's parentage, but to enforce their subsequent decisions, their orders in respect of the guardianship and

custody of anyone under the age of majority provides as perfect a safeguard as can be devised.

It may very well be thought that the appointment of a guardian in the case of a child who was being exploited for begging purposes was a somewhat extreme measure, but apart from the fact that a child who is without a legal guardian is only too often at the mercy of the conscienceless rogue, this particular type of child was by no means always penniless. In support of this statement I may say that I myself was made guardian during those years of a badly crippled girl of about five who was being drawn through the streets of Calcutta in a box on wheels and who was heir to some hundreds of rupees, the provident fund of her dead father. Had this poor little creature continued to be exposed in this way she could not have survived very much longer, for she was suffering from tuberculosis of the spine. As it was she spent a few more very happy years in a mission orphanage on the Ranchi plateau before her inevitably early death.

It is probable that I should never have undertaken the duties of honorary general secretary of this Society but for the fact that on the very day when I had taken over, as I thought temporarily, from the then secretary, who was ill, I was confronted with one of the worst cases of positive physical cruelty that was to come my way throughout my time with it. How I wish I could tell the story of this case in full, for it would be of the first

interest to the present-day psychologist, if to no one else. However, the victim is still very much alive. And here is one of the special difficulties with which organisations for the protection of children are faced when it comes to the raising of funds: the most enthralling of the individual cases can seldom be told. We had in our *de jure* or *de facto* custody throughout the time that I was secretary of the S.P.C.I. never less than two-hundred-and-fifty boys and girls of all ages, races and creeds, the experiences of every one of whom, prior to our having assumed custody of them and in very many cases afterwards, would have provided material for a full-length novel. Owing, however, to the difficulty of disguising the identity of anyone in so restricted a world as is that in which most individuals are, despite appearances to the contrary, fated to move, it was impossible to present their often almost incredible life-histories in such a way as at one and the same time to loosen the pursestrings of the charitable and to avoid, if not actually impinging on the law of libel, causing hurt to the children themselves.

One of the first things we did after I became secretary of the S.P.C.I. was to leave our miserable two rooms for larger premises. We also began to train what we hoped would be a more efficient set of enquiry officers than the two elderly police pensioners who had been responsible for those duties up to that time. Another reform we started was the institution of a proper system

of records, that which had been in existence hitherto having been dependent on the almost phenomenal memory of the elderly woman who had acted as typist and general clerk. In the absence of an adequate system of cross-references it took us three years of continuous labour to find out from the large number of files that had come into existence since the foundation of the Society, which of the thousands of children whose histories were contained in them could be called 'our' children, that is to say, those towards whom we stood in *loco parentis*. This meant that we had to add to our office staff. And now I was to encounter an aspect of our committee members that was to surprise me very much. This was their extraordinary meanness when it came to paying the staff for the arduous and often dangerous duties they were called upon to perform.

I was always being told by people who were known to be drawing enormous salaries from their respective firms and who frequently spent on a single lunch for themselves as much as would have kept one of our children for much more than a month, that I had extravagant ideas. They could hardly say that I was extravagant for myself, because I was working for nothing, but they never failed to object to the claims which I was obliged in my capacity as secretary to put forward for their consideration on behalf of the staff. Used as they were to employing the argument by which to explain the difference between their own emoluments and those of the lower-paid staffs in their various firms, that they were being paid for the superiority of their

brains, they were at a loss to know how to deal with an honorary worker who had the same social background as themselves, but they could and did lay it down as a rule that the members of the S.P.C.I. staff should be in all cases be refused a loan, however meagre. They never got so far as to admit that the person who was paying for the secretary of the Society and who was thereby saving it at the very least five hundred rupees a month, was my husband, and they continued with perfect sangfroid to direct its policy to the tune of twelve rupees per annum, which was the cost of membership, and to condemn our enquiry officers to doing work of the most responsible kind for the barest of bare living wages under the threat of instant dismissal should they be found to be taking bribes.

These were the business men. The clergy of various denominations, of whom we had a large number on the committee were, with one exception, so far from understanding our problems as a litigating society that they frequently urged upon me the desirability of staffing the Society throughout with honorary workers, though they did not say where, in a town where most of the women who would have been both active and courageous enough to undertake the work of child protection, spent the greater part of their time in gossip or playing games, these were to be found.

When I first became secretary, our president was a Judge of the High Court and he, being a lawyer, understood our difficulties as an ordinary member of the public could not hope to do. He it was who constantly

reminded the committee and those members of the public who interested themselves in our activities, that we were in the nature of a *salvage corps* and that as such we could never forecast what we might be called upon to disburse in respect of a particular child. Unfortunately, he was almost due for retirement and he was succeeded in the presidency by the then Metropolitan of India, Burma and Ceylon, whose views on the potentialities of the calls on the Society's funds were always to be summed-up in the phrase, 'We must remember to cut our coat according to our cloth.'

There were times when I found it very difficult to keep my temper with my committee, especially as none of the members did anything whatever towards the raising of funds. There were even those amongst them, though fortunately they were not many, who objected on moral grounds to the use by us of what is surely the most innocuous form of gambling known to man, the raffle. It had been our custom for some years before I took on the secretaryship, to raffle a car and indeed the S.P.C.I. Hillman Minx at one rupee a ticket was one of the few means by which we were able to keep our name before the public.

Our main source of income, apart from the membership and a few not very substantial donations, had been an annual outdoor function for which the Viceroy had lent his official residence at Alipore and that was known as the Belvedere Fete.

When it came to the Fete the business world responded nobly, for the stalls and lighting were erected

for nothing and we were spared all expense for the materials involved. Up to the time when I became secretary the Fete had never been successful enough to cause jealousy amongst the other Calcutta charities, but now that we were becoming better known it was made very plain to me that we were expected to keep our money-raising efforts within bounds unless we wanted to be thoroughly disliked.

At some time early in my days with the Society I had come across a man who seemed to me particularly gifted in ways that would contribute towards our money-raising activities and at my suggestion he undertook the publicity arrangements in connection with the current year's Fete. He kept very quiet about what he was doing, but he had a sly look on his face which told me that he probably had a surprise in store. He had. On the day on which the Fete was to take place, the whole of the front page of *The Statesman*, which in those days was ordinarily given over to the advertisements of different firms, consisted of a single blank sheet of paper bearing in the middle the legend : 'COME TO THE BELVEDERE FETE TO-DAY.'

This in itself would have been enough to make that year's Fete a roaring success and it was, though I cannot pretend that there were not additional reasons why it should have gone with such an unprecedented swing. For the first time since its inauguration, for instance, the Governor of Bengal and his wife attended in their persons to see their pet dog romp home on the dog-racing track. Then, which was also an innovation, the draw for that

year's Hillman Minx was held on the ground at midnight so that the winner was able to drive proudly away in it. Then again, the various foreign colonies had each undertaken to make themselves responsible for an appropriate sideshow and these proved so popular that it was impossible to close the Fete down at the appointed hour. Between four o'clock in the afternoon of that never-to-be forgotten Saturday in February when the Fete had opened and two o'clock the next morning, when it finally closed, we made a net profit of twenty-eight thousand rupees, which may not sound a very big sum today, but which was quite a comfortable amount then.

I learned a great many things, as I have said, while I was with the S.P.C.I. One of them was some at least of the reasons why such a book as 'Mother India' could have come to be written. In those seven years I saw countless marasmic babies with fleshless limbs, distended stomachs and the faces of a timeless old age. There came a day indeed when a month-old infant which had been brought to us dying of a starvation that was not due to the poverty of the family into which it had been born, but that was, as I afterwards learnt, illegitimate and therefore unwanted, actually died in my arms a few minutes after we had taken charge of it. But I saw also, as Katherine Mayo can have had no chance of doing, the immense care that is almost universally taken by Hindu parents to ensure the well-being of a daughter

when it comes to the question of marriage. Birth has not yet come in India to be looked upon as it is in the West as an illness, and if in some cases superstition brings about a certain amount of avoidable discomfort for the mother at the time of parturition and even what we should term neglect, that is one of the penalties that has to be paid when the unseen powers are regarded with too much awe.

I learned too what it means to attempt to fight those aspects of the unseen powers which the Western world terms 'evil' unaided by those very persons who should have provided me with maximum support. I had the legal profession behind me almost to a man and of course the doctors, but the clergy and missionaries were much less sure of the rightness of what I was about. I was not a regular Anglican communicant, nor did I profess adherence to any other Christian church and although I had a great many quite close friends in the ecclesiastical and mission worlds, most of them did not feel they could stand whole-heartedly behind one who appeared to be dangerously lacking in a religious outlook.

Word must have gone round, moreover, that I had taken exception to the re-naming by a missionary whose heart was stronger than his head, of one of our children who had been entrusted to his care and who was a *dome*. Had the re-naming been in accordance with the comparatively innocuous practice by which an Indian on being received into one or other of the Christian folds is henceforth known by an ordinary European surname

such as Gomes or Smith, though I might not have approved, I could not have complained, but it had not. Out of all the thousands of names he might have chosen, our kind and enthusiastic missionary had given the little *dome* boy the Kulin Brahmin name of Chatterjee ! My complaint meant therefore that I was regarded as being not only unnecessarily fussy with regard to a matter of the laws relating to guardianship, custody and care, but that I was that unspeakable individual an upholder of the caste system !

There was one outstanding exception to the general disapproval of me and my ways and that was a Belgian Jesuit who was apt, when I was trying to get the members of my committee to agree to a suggestion that frightened them, to bring his fist down on the table and say : 'Leave this to our secretary ! She is doing the work of God.'

I found myself one night at dinner at Bishop's House, by the side of a youngish and reputedly wealthy English bachelor who was among those who were known as *burra sahibs* in one of the big managing agency houses in the town. As it was just after the notably successful Belvedere Fete and as he had always been a member of the S.P.C.I., our talk turned inevitably on the work of the Society and he presently said : 'Do you know, I don't believe I have paid my subscription for this year.' As our membership list was never so large that I could not keep the details of its finances in my head, I was able to reply that this was so. He then went on to make the following extraordinary

pronouncement: 'To tell you the truth I have been wondering for some time past whether I should go on supporting a society which holds itself out to protect children of all races and creeds. I should like to think that what I give is benefitting none but Christians and preferably Europeans, or at least children of the mixed blood.' I was too much taken aback for a moment to make any comment on this, but when I had recovered a little I bethought me to say: 'Where, if I may ask, do you earn your living?' He gave me a somewhat withering look and replied: 'Here, of course.' 'Very well, then—' I said and turned to my neighbour on the other side. His subscription came next day, but I noted that it was no more than the customary twelve rupees.

It has often been said in my hearing that the British might have done much more than they did for India while they were here. Such a remark can of course only be made with regard to India as a whole and from the stand-point of the present day, that is to say from that of socialism, for the idea that governments should concern themselves with purely social legislation on a nation-wide scale is a very modern one. It is however applicable to India's cities and especially to a place like Calcutta, which was founded by Britishers and that was even to come in due course to be spoken of as the second city of the British Empire. One of the most powerful arguments against colonialism is indeed that it can

never hope to engage the attention of social reformers on what may be called the grand scale. The John Howards, the Lord Shaftesburys and the Edwin Chadwicks had no call to go abroad in order to fight for their reforms; they were too much taken up with the misery at their own back doors. An Edwin Chadwick could have brought about a civic revolution in Calcutta as he did in the London of a hundred years ago, but it was the fate of the then capital city of India only to have been able to attract the man who went by the name of *nabob*, that is to say one who made a fortune in India and who transported it to his English, Scottish, Irish or Welsh home without leaving any trace behind him of his sojourn in India except hatred in the hearts of those he had despoiled and the palatial buildings he had erected for his own use. The England of the eighteenth century expressed its abhorrence of the nabobs and their ways in unambiguous terms by impeaching the worst of them, but that nabobbery has never disappeared from the Indian scene can be inferred from the attitude of my neighbour at Bishop's House. The only differences are, firstly that, try as he may, the neo-nabob cannot carry away with him when he leaves quite such an immense fortune as he could in former days, nor I imagine would the attempt pass as unnoticed now as it did then; and secondly, that he no longer builds enormous private houses of the kind that is represented by what used to be called 'Barwell House', but is now St. Thomas's School for Girls. The nabobs of these latter times are no longer necessarily English, or even

European, nor do they always take their money out of the country, but they have this in common with their prototypes, that they have little or no regard for the well-being of their fellow-citizens. In fact, as in the past, they are too greedy to be kind and too narrow to be racially and religiously unbiassed.

Amongst my duties as secretary of the S.P.C.I. was that of representing the Society on the governing bodies of other institutions in the city which were supported by voluntary contributions and this, as much as our own difficulties regarding the accommodation of our children, gave me a clear picture of what the city lacked in the way of what might be termed charitable amenities. There was nothing in the whole of the Calcutta area corresponding to what used to be known in England in the days before the welfare state as a workhouse except The Refuge in Bowbazar, which could accommodate at the most no more than two hundred destitute men, women and children. Over the gate were inscribed the words: "For the Helpless, Homeless and Hopeless", there were no trained attendants and as there was no mental hospital of any size in Calcutta, or indeed in the whole of Bengal, amongst the inmates when I knew it were twenty or more pauper lunatics, some of whom were homicidal.

This meant too that I was to have the experience on coming out of a cinema at eleven-thirty at night, of being approached by a European sergeant of police who knew me by sight, to ask whether I could tell him where he could take a young Indian girl who was lying on the

pavement nearby, as he could not bear to think of a decent-looking girl, as she was, being forced to spend the night alone on the pavement among the riff-raff of the town. I could see that the young sergeant did not think very much of me when I suggested his trying The Refuge, but as I said to him, 'If the police do not know what to do with the destitute, it is not very likely that anybody else will.' In point of fact I myself had on the whole a good opinion of The Refuge for I knew it to be doing a heroic job of work in the face of almost insuperable difficulties.

It was in circumstances such as I have described that begging could never have been made illegal and that the more stringent clauses of the Bengal Children Act could not be made operable and if I were to be asked why, if the British were too selfish to do anything much towards the amelioration of conditions in a city like Calcutta the Indian himself did not do so, my answer would be that the Hindu joint family system can be held largely responsible for the withholding of the charitable donation and bequest for the want of which the Indian organisations that are supported by voluntary contributions are apt to languish or even die, for under such a system the demands of the family must in all cases be met first. It is surely easy to see that with a family where, though it may be rich as things go, there are several unmarried daughters and a number of sons of school or university age, not to mention hosts of poor relations, the imponderable expenses thus set up make it next door to impossible for the heads of the family

to come to the point of deciding to give to charity on a scale commensurate with the family's manifest way of life.

I am of course aware that all over the country large contributions are made to charity, particularly in the shape of the feeding of the poor, but I think it can hardly be denied that charitable organisations that undertake very much more constructive work than the mere provision of food, receive much less support than they should. Even in a country like England, which is nowadays what is known as a welfare state, charity is still supported by the voluntary contribution and her innumerable charitable organisations are to this day in receipt of an immense amount of money which is mostly raised by means of continuous appeals, membership subscriptions, individual donations and bequests, the small coins dropped into collecting boxes and frequent entertainments of all kinds.

I resigned from the secretaryship of the S.P.C.I. at the end of the year nineteen-forty. There were a good many reasons for my doing so. For one thing, as was only to be expected in a social setting that still partook so largely of the Victorian epoch, it was considered altogether unsuitable for the wife of a prominent barrister to be working, not for her living, for I was unpaid, but working at all. It had taken a long time for me to recognise this, partly because no one dared put what he thought into plain language, but also because I had never before been in a community where

those with leisure did not do some kind of social work, or where if for some reason or other they could not do anything of an active kind, they did not give such time as they could to sitting on committees or devising means of raising funds.

Then there was the question of the *sort* of work I was engaged in. A memsahib might pass an hour or two every so often on what could be called the *lighter* side of philanthropic endeavour without detriment to her husband's commercial or professional prestige, but it was a very different matter when it came, as it did in my case, to keeping full office hours, hearing all sorts of 'ugly' narratives, encountering members of what is commonly known as 'the underworld' and even being called upon at times to give evidence in court. Furthermore, there was always the possibility that I should hear stories that did not redound to the credit of persons whose lives impinged upon those of our own social circles. In fact I was in the position of one who might very well come to know too much.

My own reasons for leaving were of 'course of a rather different order. Foremost amongst them was that I regarded the underpayment of the staff and especially of the inspectors, as being likely to create precisely the kinds of conditions from which we were engaged in rescuing children at large. I had found, for instance, that one of our most trusted employes was the only wage-earner in a family of fifteen wholly dependent souls. Nor was he the only one in our office who had a heavier burden on his shoulders than any human

being in a civilised community should be called upon to bear. All my efforts to better the working conditions and particularly the pay of the twenty-three employes who now did the work of the Society, having failed, I had been driven to the conclusion that someone other than myself might be able to combine the secretarial duties with those of a collector and so to some extent to be in a position to dictate to a committee that seemed to me likely to remain adamant with regard to the welfare of the staff so long as I continued to be secretary. It was afterwards to be made plain to me that my committee were under the impression that I was a wealthy woman and that therefore my ideas with regard to the running of the Society were bound to be extravagant and I was to find that, no matter how untrue, a reputation for wealth once gained in India has a way of sticking. This rumour with regard to myself was I think due to the fact that, being the last of my father's family and indeed of our name, I had inherited a good deal of antique furniture and *bibelots*, and as I had all along hoped to spend the rest of my days in India, I brought these out to Calcutta, where, since we occupied the upper part of a noble eighteenth-century mansion, they at last found their proper setting. As luck would have it, however, the packers in England had sent all my belongings in one huge case and as this was too high to go under the iron gateway of the house in Middleton Street, the lorry on which it had been brought from the docks, took it round the corner to the Society's premises in Camac Street where there

was ample space for it to be unpacked. Not one single object contained in that enormous case had cost me so much as an anna and even the charges for the ocean freight had been met out of insurance money. Nevertheless, I feel sure that it was these harmless old family belongings of mine that gave rise to the notion that where money was concerned I should be unnecessarily lavish.

After a time I was to give up trying to persuade people that neither I nor my husband had at any time in our lives been what might be called well-off in the sense in which the term is understood in a place like Calcutta. But of course the business of being well or badly off in a country which has three separate and distinct scales of pay according to whether the recipient is a European, an Anglo-Indian, or a middle-class Indian, cannot be considered in other than a purely comparative light.

In addition to the foregoing very cogent reasons for my resignation, was the fact that for some time past I had been gradually coming to a realisation of the truths that are enshrined in the word *karma*. I had perceived that this word is not what is usually meant in the West by *fate*, or rather that implies a very great deal more than can be conveyed by any one word in the English language. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines it as 'the sum total of a person's actions in one of his successive states of existence, viewed as deciding his fate

in the next;' and after the semi-colon the word 'destiny' is added as an aid to understanding. Here again, as it seemed to me, was a reason why an organisation such as the S.P.C.I. was being insufficiently supported, for, when a concept of this kind is only half understood it can easily lead to a shrugging of the shoulders when it comes to the question of the suffering of one's fellow man. What *karma* really implies in fact is that every moment of time is the summation of all the moments since the world began and that therefore what takes place in it is inevitable.

In saying this I would not have it thought that I am seeking either to discourage those who have undertaken, or who are about to undertake work amongst their more unfortunate brethren, or to offer it as an excuse for having ceased to do such work myself. On the contrary, the impulse to do or to give is manifestly as much a part of one's *karma* as to refrain from doing and giving, indeed I regard social work in a country so badly in need of every kind of charitable undertaking as is India as being of every bit as much value to the dispenser of charity as it is to the recipient. I would even go so far as to put forward the theory that a great part of her troubles where her student population is concerned would be resolved if the young people of the country were to be helped towards a greater understanding of the problems of the poor and to be encouraged thereafter to work for their amelioration.

As will easily be seen, the result of the application of the idea of *karma* as I saw it to the kind of work I

had been doing was, to say the least of it, unsettling, for it amounted to this, that there would always be cases where, despite our utmost efforts, we could do nothing. When therefore a child who had been most cruelly ill-treated by her father and of whom, after a long period of almost superhuman attempts to defeat his wickedness, we had obtained custody from the court, said to me with an air of preternatural wisdom : 'I ought not to be taken away from daddy because he needs me,' I took her words as a sure indication that I was due to go on elsewhere. Throughout my time with the Society I had been upheld by a sense of mission. This had now gone from me. The moment I became fully aware of this I gave notice of my intention to resign as soon as somebody could be found to take my place.

The Second World War was already more than a year old when I came to this decision and my husband and I had now to consider how we could best serve the interests of the country in which we had been born and those of the one in which we had made our home. For some time past we had had a rented bungalow at Ranikhet, the military station in the Kumaon Hills and as a large emergency hospital had been opened in the cantonment, we thought it advisable to divide forces, he to remain in Calcutta to attend to his professional duties, I to go to our hill home and take in convalescent officers for as long as hostilities endured.

While waiting for my first batch of guests I set to

work on a task which my realisation of the truths of *karma* had seemed to make imperative, that is to say I began to write an account of my life which should enable me to find out to my own satisfaction where I had gone wrong in the past. I based my narrative on my visual shortcomings and kept strictly within that framework, for it seemed to me that this eye-defect which had only recently been discovered and for which I was even then being treated, had frustrated me at every turn. It took me nearly eighteen months to complete what was actually a detailed self-analysis, so that theories that had seemed to me new and startling while I wrote, were to be accepted commonplaces before the manuscript was finished, so rapid nowadays are the developments in the fields of optics and psychology.

One of the results of this outpouring of mine was that I became deeply interested in modern psychology and this was an immense help to me in my dealing with the war-torn men, most of whom were very young, who spent varying times under our roof within the next three years. Ranikhet was full to the brim at this time. We had the wounded, the sick, the neurotic, the refugee, every one of whom to some degree or other was occupied in getting all he or she could extract from what seemed to be the last remnants of a way of life which was about to pass away for ever.

I now saw again what I had seen on the voyage out; men and women who were drinking to forget their woes. How they drank ! The first convalescents who came to me were all refugees from the Burma campaign with

the exception of one, a woman, who had come away from Singapore in one of the last ships to leave that beleaguered port. They had all lost everything they possessed and had suffered the shock of seeing the triumph of enemy arms. I was very much older than they were and so was able to look back on the First World War, an experience which had given me absolute faith in the power of the British to emerge victorious from any ordeal that might come their way. I had not felt this assurance in respect of the other allies, and this was perhaps because I had had what I can only suppose to have been an *infra-astral* glimpse of what was taking place in France. This had taken the form of my being as it were suspended near the west coast of that country at such a height as to be able to see the vast movement of refugees southward from Paris and when next morning I joined my husband at the breakfast-table and said: 'Noel, France is going to capitulate,' though I was met with a smile and an incredulous: 'Nonsense, Skipper,' that being his pet name for me, I knew that the English were going to be left to stand alone.

It is strange to me looking back how, even in spite of what I had seen of the people of England in the First World War, I should have been so certain that she would come through a second and infinitely worse one, not unscathed, for heaven knows she suffered enough, but with her land intact. I can only suppose that it had been born in on me in the years between 1914 and 1918 that the capacity of the British people, to the last man, woman and child, to rise to supreme heights in moments

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

of national peril would bring them through whatever befell.

Meanwhile, the thing that appalled me throughout the war years was that there could be found nowhere in Christendom a voice in denunciation of war, as such, that was powerful enough to command the attention of all creeds. There was in fact only one in the whole world and that was Gandhi's and he found himself in excessively ill-odour for his pains.

PART FOUR

Towards the end of nineteen-forty-three, the number of convalecents having dwindled to a mere trickle, I came back to Calcutta. And now was to take place one of those unspectacular but decisive events that serve to alter the current of a person's life. This was simply that I went one day into the Oxford Book Shop in Park Street to change my books at their lending library and found in their shelves a small volume which I had not noticed there before, the title of which was 'Yoga for the West'. I turned over the pages with a view to finding out whether it was a book that would repay reading, when to my intense astonishment I suddenly knew that for the first time in my life I held the truth in my hands. I had opened the book at the pages that dealt with the subject of re-birth.

To anybody born and bred in India, unless they have come very strongly under missionary influence, this moment in my life will not seem anything extraordinary; but to the average Britisher it will. True, there are signs in the literature of the England of to-day, and especially in the more serious works of fiction, that the doctrine of re-birth is gaining a measure of credence. But in the England of my time the notion was met in general with derision, and as thought tends to lag behind emotion, I imagine that there are still large numbers of people to whom the idea remains unacceptable.

I had been accustomed in my early years to hearing any mention of what was usually spoken of as 'reincarnation' as being met with the objections that the hearer did not on the one hand want to come back to this earth at all, especially if, as seemed certain, he would be an entirely fresh personality with no knowledge whatever of the events or contacts of his previous existence; and on the other, that he or she did not care for the idea of being re-born as, for instance, a *pig*. Why this creature should have been the one to be chosen out of all the animal kingdom as the possible recipient of the speaker's soul, is hard to say, unless it was symbolic of mankind's awareness that he will be called upon to expiate that which is the besetting sin of the contemporary world, namely, *greed*. It was noticeable meanwhile that they never allowed themselves to suggest that they might come back to earth as a more primitive species of *man*. Perhaps it is that in the modern world it is only too easy to see that the up-to-date hygienic pig-sty is no such bad place, especially if its inmates are fed, as they sometimes are, on *lilies*, and even if the slaughter-house lies at the end of it, whereas the conditions under which a not inconsiderable part of mankind lives and has its being, simply will not bear thinking about.

If in those days one ventured to ask what one's companion's views were on the after-life, one would as often as not be met with the remark, 'Oh, nobody nowadays believes in the old idea of heaven.' Quite so. Then what did they believe? The answer was,

nothing at all. Apart from the hope which everyone cherished that they would meet with the beloved dead again, their minds were a blank on the subject.

I remembered now that my father had said to me suddenly one day in the last months of his life, 'I believe the Hindus have got the right of it, with their notion of a great inchoate mass of consciousness to which we all return,' but I had thought no more of the matter except to be thankful that one who was obviously soon to meet death should have been vouchsafed even that measure of reassurance with regard to his future state.

My mother, on the other hand prided herself, as women are apt to do, on a more realistic view of her latter end and she often quoted something she had either read or heard to the effect that when you were dead you were dead and that was all there was to it. She was to die of a disseminated cancer after an unusually prolonged illness and as I sat with her in her last hours I was to see that she too had received some kind of revelation, because after a long period of unconsciousness under morphia during which I had been listening awestruck for what seemed to me a long time to the rhythmical slowing of the breath that is the unmistakable sign of coming dissolution, she suddenly opened her eyes and turned to me in what was to prove her last moment of life with a smile of full recognition.

From that moment I had always believed without any question whatever in what is known in Christendom as the immortality of the soul. But as to what happened to this continuing consciousness I could not even guess.

I took the little book home with me and began at once to practice the very modified form of orthodox yoga which was recommended by its author. It was a sensible little book and I was to find that the truth of everything which was set forth in it was susceptible of proof. And this gradually brought me to another point because I said to myself that if this was true then other things that were said by and about Hinduism might be true also, but the full realisation of what this implied did not come to me till very much later on.

The resumption of a discipline that I had last known as a girl of thirteen was like coming back after a long absence to a well-loved home. I now saw that there had been a further step in my initiation when, at the age of seventeen I had begun a period of training for the stage at what is now known as the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, but that was then called quite simply Tree's School, after the well-known English Actor-Manager. For while there I had been introduced to the form of physical relaxation which is part of the equipment of the stage aspirant that is known as *Delsarte*. This not only enables him to fall without bodily injury, but induces fluidity of movement and allows those who acquire it to relax each part of the body separately. It was of course only one of the subjects we were taught, but when I came to the end of my training I said to myself that if I had learned nothing else of value during those months, in *Delsarte* I had gained something that would stand me in good stead all the rest of my life. I did not know then how true this was.

The word 'yoga' is interpreted in the West in many different ways, but I find that nearly all the Westerners I come across think of it as meaning a form of physical training. So it is. But it is a great deal more than merely that. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines it as being a 'Hindu system of philosophic meditation and asceticism designed to effect the reunion of the devotee's soul with the universal spirit.' It is of course a Sanskrit word, the nearest meaning of which in English is 'union'.

To anyone who has lived in close communion with Hindu thought for any length of time it should have become plain that in yoga the Hindu possesses a *method* or *path* by which he may reach to an outlook on what may be spoken of as 'the unseen' which is only to be attained to in the West by those who are known as 'mystics'. The great difference between the mystical approach of India and the West, as it seems to me, is that the former is governed by conventional and well-understood rules which at one time were part of everybody's education, whereas in the West the mystic has all along been left to flounder unaided by anything but his own intuition. The result of this is that in India and indeed in the East generally, the saint is recognised, accepted and revered. In the West, on the other hand, he is put to the severest tests before admission is made of the validity of his experiences.

That there was a time when yoga was part of the Christian way of life is plainly to be seen from such records as we have of the period immediately following

Christ's crucifixion. Had it been otherwise Christianity would surely not have spread with the extraordinary rapidity it did amongst the intellectuals of most of the countries bordering on the eastern Mediterranean. So great indeed was the hold of the teachings of Christ on the thinking part of these populations and so intense was what may be called the mystical 'fire' of the times, that when the later Roman emperors proclaimed themselves gods, the Christian intellectuals died in their thousands rather than acknowledge what they looked upon as impious claims on the part of men whom they regarded as being nothing short of monsters.

The result of this wholesale and voluntary martyrdom of the early Christian intelligentsia was that the greater part of its yogic tradition was lost. It has never been replaced, so that we have in the Christendom of to-day a world lacking that metaphysical background without which man is little better than the beasts and for the want of which he is desperately and unceasingly unhappy.

In the meantime, that part of the yogic method which is expressed by the word 'asceticism' has survived till the present day. The early Christian converts, living as they did in a period of the vilest possible excesses, imagined, with a good deal of reason, that they could not hope to attain to that 'reunion with the universal spirit' which was as much their aim as it always has been and still is that of the yoga of Hinduism, unless they withdrew from the world. As they had been born close to the great deserts of North Africa

that is where they went, just as the Hindu went into the jungle. Withdrawal into the desert and the jungle came in Christianity and Hinduism respectively to be synonymous with holiness and in both cases the faiths were weakened from then on by the loss to ordinary life of many of the best minds amongst their adherents. From the point of view of the present day therefore it would be helpful to the majority of us if the word 'asceticism' were to be expunged from the definition of yoga, for it is this insistence on the idea of asceticism that has turned many a would-be seeker from all desire for religious experience and so has unwittingly diminished the sum-total of human goodness.

As the war was still in progress when I came down to Calcutta there were many non-Indians in the town and I soon found myself in the midst of a number of intelligent young Britishers who had been drawn into the fighting services and who had brought to the contemplation of a way of life other than their own a freshness of outlook which the foreigner who is a permanent dweller in India is usually without. By degrees we formed ourselves into a set of five or six individuals, all of whom were interested in some sense in metaphysical questions. We met at more or less regular intervals and discussed any matters which had given rise in our minds to a need for clarification.

As a result of this I had the experience one day of realising for the first time what the relationship of

Christ with his disciples must have been like. This was something to which I had never given any thought before and I was excited by the discovery, but I was also shocked. One did not bring Jesus Christ down to the level of ordinary human beings in this casual and impertinent way ! I was surprised by my reaction to these thoughts, because I had always hitherto regarded myself as a free-thinker in all religious matters, and I saw now very clearly the terrible fear in which we in Christendom all live of committing what is known as 'blasphemy' and how it prevents absolutely the delightful interchange of wholly innocent and indeed lofty ideas such as I was now enjoying for the first time in my life.

I did not pursue this line of thought any further at that point, nor did I communicate it to anyone else. I was too deeply engrossed in the various manifestations that take place during the initial stages of the yogic path, for everything that was happening to me seemed to be in exact accordance with what is promised by the writers on the subject.

I was the only member of our small group who had practised any form of yogic discipline before and as we were all of us without a guidance beyond that which can be gained from the written word we wasted a great deal of time in asking questions of ourselves and each other to which none of us could provide answers. For instance, we were for a long time taken up with the problem of what may be thought to constitute the difference between meditation and contemplation, for all our esoteric reading seemed to suggest that there was

one. We were also deeply exercised by the insistence in the Hindu scriptures on the conceptions of illusion as embodied in the word 'maya' and we made the common mistake of worrying our brains for an answer which can only be obtained when the intellect that is unsupported by intuition, ceases to function. We were all of us avid meanwhile for what we thought of as spiritual 'experience' and were going through the period when so many people, impatient at the delay in what they believe to be the process of attainment, leave the world for ashrams, monasteries or caves, according to the part of the globe on which they have received their modicum of light.

I have always regarded myself as fortunate in that such hankerings as I had at this time after a life of contemplation unharried by the rubs of mundane things, had to be sternly repressed, for at this precise moment I was called upon to endure a glimpse of war at first hand. A friend of mine had organised what has come to be known as occupational therapy in the military hospitals of Calcutta and I was pressed into service for a month or so to replace one of her workers who had gone on leave. This happened to be the period of the apex of the campaign in Assam and the wards were full of men who had been brought straight from the battlefields by air. As during the First World War I had worked as a clerk in the city of London instead of, as had been the case with many of my contemporaries, as a member of the auxiliary nursing services, I had never yet seen at close quarters the atrocious wastage of

human material, not to speak of the physical suffering, that war involves. I only had to endure the sights, sounds and smells of those surgical wards for the space of four weeks, but never again shall I be able to forget what I saw in them of sorrow, misery and bodily degradation.

On more than one occasion while I was quite young I had been told by friends who were skilled in palmistry that there were unmistakable signs in my hand that when I reached the age of fifty-one something or other was going to happen to me. What exactly it was going to be, they had never been able to say and I only retained the memory of what they had said because it seemed to me curious that they should agree so closely on the age at which the unidentifiable event of which they could see the lineal evidence was going to take place. I was now in my fiftieth year, so that I supposed that if palmistry were to be taken seriously I might expect the something or other to happen to me within the next twelve months or so. In the meantime I practised yoga according to the books.

In everything I have ever read about yogic practices there has always been a warning against allowing oneself to become too taken up with the manifestations that are apt to beset one at the outset. When I had been ardent in the pursuit of the Swedish exercises that I had been taught at school we had been given no such warning, which was only natural since nobody knew

what we were at. Now, looking back I saw for the first time that some of the more puzzling things that had happened to me then had been the outcome of an excess of deep breathing. In the self-analysis I had conducted while I was at Ranikhet, I had written of my thirteenth or fourteenth year :

On going to bed at this time I would often be unable to sleep for anything up to an hour or more and during that period there would be such a revolving of lights behind my closed eyelids, such an explosion of fireworks, as to make me think of Kipling's description in his novel 'The Light that Failed' of the moments before his young artist's final loss of sight, and the night would seldom go by when I did not rouse myself from the edge of sleep to discover whether or not I could still see.

On re-reading what follows this passage I find that I have not recorded having felt anything that could be called fear as a result of that which might reasonably be thought of as somewhat alarming experiences, and indeed this was so : nor did I ever speak of them to anyone. What seems to me, moreover, to make this stranger, is that I attributed these light disturbances to the state of my eyes, which, ever since my attack of smallpox had not been good. Later, when I was in my twenties, I had had one of those periods of absolute loss of sight which are characteristic of hay-fever and migraine and it was during the half-hour or so of its duration that I realised that I had never within my recollection till then seen anything that could be called darkness. Although this attack of blindness had been sudden and complete I was again not at all frightened by it. I was on the other hand so fascinated by seeing a

real dense velvety blackness for the first time in my sentient life, that I could think of nothing else.

Now again, I was practising yoga with what might be thought of as too great a degree of zeal, but this time my experiences were taking place against a background of moral responsibility that enabled me to check their relative worth.

The day came, for instance, when, as I was walking down Park Street I was stopped by a young soldier who asked me if I could help him to find number seventy-one. He said that he had been up and down several times and had not been able to discover it. Although I had been living in the neighbourhood for more than ten years, I had never paid any attention to the numbers of the buildings in Park Street. Those I had any dealings with were shops and for the rest it was one of our jokes that the streets of Calcutta were for the most part numbered in such an eccentric way that it was next door to impossible to find out where a particular number was likely to occur. I was just about to tell the young soldier about this when, to my astonishment, I saw immediately across the road from where we were standing the number seventy-one *framed*, as it were, almost illuminated and *a great deal larger than life-size*. I said, 'There's your number!' and pointed it out. I was interested to observe that he was not seeing what I was showing him. However, he took it on trust and after thanking me for my help crossed the road and when I had seen that he had found the number he wanted, I went on my way.

I had one or two other experiences of this sort and then one day I saw a friend of mine going past in a car and, immediately after, the same friend walked past me on the pavement. Then there was an inexplicable episode with a canister of tea which went on yielding tea-leaves till I thought it would never stop.

These quite trivial experiences did not seem to me to have much point, though I could see that if one gained control of them they might sometimes be useful in a completely humdrum way. That they have a danger I also saw, for they may easily be misused. Meanwhile, they have an eternal fascination for people because they are of the same order, though not of the same degree, as what are commonly called 'miracles'.

Presently I made up my mind to put these phenomena to a rigorous test by deliberately relaxing every muscle in my body. Sure enough, I soon found myself suspended over our Middleton Street garden. The sensation was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, in fact it could hardly be called a sensation at all : the only noticeable thing about it was that the green of the surrounding trees was not the green I was accustomed to see, but was tinged with yellow.

On recovery from this phenomenal state I decided that never again would I voluntarily seek to enter upon it. To this day I fail to see what infra-astral experiences do, unless it is to make those who indulge in them even more unfit than they would otherwise be, to lead ordinary lives. I had seen that what the books said with regard to such experiences was true, that is to say,

that they were nothing but a divergence from the main path.

By the June of nineteen-forty-four I had reached the stage where I was beginning to think of psycho-analysis as providing a yoga or method by which the precept 'Know thyself', which plays so large a part in what may be called the 'higher' Hinduism, might be expedited. The psychological approach was of course designed for the psychically disordered, but it seemed to me that there must come a time in the life of the relatively normal individual when a greater self-knowledge would benefit not only him or her, but society at large, and that where he or she was without belief in a world beyond ordinary human apprehension, the doctrines of karma and re-birth could be counted upon to complete the process.

It was at about this time that as a result of the book which I had written at Ranikhet, I was elected a member of the Calcutta Psycho-Analytical Society, but owing to transport difficulties, which were then very severe, I was unable to attend any of their meetings. Because of this and because it was impossible in India in those war years to keep abreast of the latest writings on psychology I was thrown back on my own ideas on the subject and began to take notes. Of these notes those that deal exclusively with the subject of psycho-analysis are at best fumbling and most of them, so rapid has been the advance in the psycho-analytical

field, are now badly out of date. Nevertheless I propose to quote from them because they serve to show better than can be done in any other way, the direction my particular path was taking. Moreover, here and there amongst them may be an idea, however clumsily expressed, that will be of help to others.

On the 7th of June I wrote :

It is manifest that the Freudian hypotheses constitute a very small part of the picture of any given individual. It is this insistence on the part as if it were the whole that is likely to distress the subject of analysis and that has brought so much hostility into the discussion. In attempting analysis myself I should do all in my power to remove causes into impersonal zones. For instance, I should stress the idea of the *temporal* and *spiritual* in preference to the complexes. . . . It does not help the subject to preserve an attitude of mind which may be his only hope during the breaking-down process, if blame is laid on the compensations to which he has turned. . . . If the analysis has been a success the need for them will have disappeared. It would seem to be necessary to impress on the subject that psychic disorders cannot be overcome by what we call courage, or by any kind of violent effort on his part, but by the facing of and the understanding of, the causes underlying them, which are often not personal at all.

and again :

It has struck me that little or no notice is taken of the human relationships of the patient, except where they feed the idea of a complex. No interest is shown in the patient's preferences. He is not asked to indicate the sources of attraction where he is concerned, nor to analyse the links between himself and others, except in so far as

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

they contribute to a purely sexual picture. In the emotional field the insistence is on hate as being necessarily an outcome of love. That love can place the individual beyond the realms where hate is possible does not seem to be recognised. The picture of the individual as drawn inferentially by the psycho-analyst lacks any element of positive beauty: rather it is repellent. The patient, who is of necessity out of love with himself, can only be further repelled by the psycho-analyst's portrait. ... He will be hurt where the existing hurt should be healed.

Under the date 3rd July 1944 I find the following :

When it is necessary for the first time to think about our feelings we are like mechanics with bad tools setting out to repair an engine of which we know nothing.

And this thought was enlarged upon on the 7th of July by :

It may be surmised that whatever the difference in the intellectual equipment of man, his emotional reactions will differ very little from those of his fellows. This is because though we go to school for our intellects, we do not do so for our emotions. While we are acquiring knowledge and to some extent learning how to use it, our emotions are left to take care of themselves. Most of us indeed are from the emotional point of view slum-dwellers. The meagre vocabulary and inexpressive voice are two of the signals by which emotional inadequacy can be recognised. The more highly-equipped an individual is intellectually the more painful it is to witness his emotional inadequacy.

By the 12th of July I had come to this point :

The Freudian hypothesis leaves out of account not only the difference between the temporal and spiritual, but

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

the place the realisation of that difference must make in the individual mind. . . . He who is striving for spiritual advancement can ignore the temporal, because the spiritual is the true living of life. Put in a rather more comprehensible way it can be said that by living in the realms of the spirit, daily life (which is often largely temporal) becomes not more difficult, but easier.

The mediaeval idea that to attain to spiritual advancement one must go off and live in solitude in a desert, cave, or monastery, died hard. On the contrary, such advancement can only be obtained through intensive experience (i.e., emotional conflict). The 'religious', though they have the desire to advance, are emotionally static, but they flatter themselves meanwhile that they are the only people who are capable of advancing. Spiritual advancement might take a religious experience in its stride—it could not do more. (*Religion* is here used to denote adherence to some recognised form of spiritual teaching and not to direct apprehension by the individual of 'God'.)

On the 28th of July I had got to this :

Man is held to 'know' a thing if he has read that someone else does. The major part of our education is of course founded upon this particular form of evasion. We *learn* much and in almost every case *realise* nothing.

And on the 15th of August to this :

There are those among us who are able to recognise 'genius' when it manifests itself in some form of 'doing', but almost none of us can perceive it when it is a matter of 'becoming' unless he who is on the road is wearing a religious dress.

The 20th of August brought forth this :

The failure to differentiate between the temporal and the spiritual brings about a state of things in which the judgements on individuals by each other may be founded

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

on trivialities. He of whom it is said that 'all his geese are swans' is a person whose values and judgements lie within the realms of the temporal. It seems to me manifest that most of the judgements that have their origins in these realms, that is to say of 'limitation', are bound to hurt some one or more of the unintegrated individuals with whom the world abounds. To say to a human being that some other human being has a 'good' heart hurts nobody, but to say in similar circumstances that someone is 'good' looking, may raise a storm of jealousy in the hearer's breast

And on the 23rd of October comes this :

The temporal may be expressed as 'diversity', the spiritual as 'oneness'. Diversity would seem to mean confusion, terror and despair. Oneness is synonymous with strength, calm and certainty. But diversity may be, as it were, invested with oneness.

On the 7th of November I had arrived at :

He who clings to the finite (i.e., refuses to allow himself to 'recognise') is bound to be lonely. In 'oneness' is limitless companionship.

There is a gap till the 11th of February 1945, then comes :

The cultivation of the intellect is a means of avoiding reality, which is all-knowledge. The wholly unspoilt individual could intuit everything that civilised man now learns by means of the methods known as education and scholarship.

On March the 12th I wrote :

The intellectual says "I must know" and destroys himself in the attempt to leave nothing unknown. The

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

mystic says, "I must prepare to become a means of knowing" and is indifferent as to whether, apart from God, there is anything to know.

The intellectual seeks his knowledge without having provided a channel into which it can run, for that channel requires for its being absolute stillness and no effort of egoistic will. The mystic is himself a channel, which becomes eventually one with knowing.

By the 15th of April I had got to :

It is only here and there, amongst people of rare talent that we may find an apprehension of the One *and* a grasp of the many. This is not to say that any man can hope to acquire knowledge of more than a very small fraction of what there is to learn of the diversity that invests the world. The nearer a man is to the One, the more he will say the same things over and over again in a different dress till at last he attains to the stillness of knowledge.

On the 19th of April comes :

Simplicity, or primitiveness of living, without that awareness which is consciousness of the spirit, constitutes what we know as savagery. Life can be a mere scramble for food. It is this scramble, especially when it takes place against a background of mechanical pleasures, that makes so much of modern life totally without grace.

Then one morning, the exact date of which I do not know, I was engaged in my usual seven or eight minutes of contemplation, when it seemed to me that I could see the diversity with which I was surrounded like the pieces of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope. Suddenly they fell together into a single whole and on that day I wrote while still in a state of ecstasy :

God is a culmination of forces: the one absolute: a single point.

PART FIVE

The stage to which I had now come is marked by an immediate heightening of awareness, the most striking of the effects of which is a very great increase in emotional control.

The period which follows is bound to be difficult, for the yogin is living in a world where little provision is made for his state. If he is a Westerner he will be used to a society in which people are largely ruled by emotion and especially by that form of it that is vicarious and that is therefore neither deeply nor intimately felt. Moreover, he has now to get rid of a vast number of his previous prejudices and convictions, so that for a time, varying with the individual and before stabilisation has been fully attained, there will follow an interval of what can only be described as *numbness*, during which many of the things that formerly possessed value for him, cease to have meaning.

Again I was unable to indulge any desire I might have had to sit back and savour my changed condition. Towards the end of the year nineteen-forty-four my husband had suffered a first attack of coronary thrombosis and as it remained uncertain for some time following his illness whether he would ever get back to a state where he could continue in his professional life I was obliged to look for a post in order to relieve him of the entire responsibility for the upkeep of our home. In point of

fact he made a quick recovery and what appeared to be a complete one, but as I had been warned by his doctors that a patient in his condition might die suddenly at any time I persevered in my intention to find a job which would transfer at least some of the burden of our day-to-day expenses from his shoulders to mine.

I do not propose to bother the reader with an account of the year I spent as a joint secretary of the newly-established Indian Institute of Art in Industry except to say that it introduced me to a side of Indian life about which I might otherwise have known nothing. One of the Institute's activities was the recording in what was hoped would prove a readily accessible form of India's indigenous designs and I was put in charge of it. Thus it was that I saw how sadly this side of India's heritage of craftsmanship had come to be neglected and how near to starvation her matchlessly skilful village craftsmen had been brought by a combination, as I believe, of a decline in taste on the part of her monied circles and the imposition on the populace at large by the greed of man of factory-made goods the lure of which it was either too poor, too lazy, or too tasteless to resist.

Meanwhile, my re-emergence into the phenomenal world was bringing me to a point where, for the first time in my life, I had begun to think. Hitherto, as with most of us, I had experienced thought either as an outcome of or as an accompaniment of emotion. As I began to free myself from the purely emotional approach to it however I realised that I had been in the habit of expressing myself more or less dogmatically in respect

of matters which I was seeing from only one angle. Now I saw that in order to think about a thing from as many aspects as one was capable of envisaging, it was necessary to devote time to the process. The first occasion on which I really thought I found to my surprise that many days and nights were not enough to exhaust the ideas that came into my mind and it was indeed three weeks or more before I had, as it seemed to me, examined what I was thinking about from all angles.

I thought with amusement that this was what would have been called in the England of my youth an *obsession*. To me it seemed more like a *passion*. I felt as though I was seeing my subject in its entirety as one sees the world in the form of maps. Whether it was an obsession or whether it was a passion, this was to prove, though I did not altogether realise it at the time, one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Circumstances enabled me to leave the Indian Institute of Art in Industry at the end of my first year's agreement, but before I could begin to make use of my newly-acquired leisure we were plunged into the midst of what came to be known as the Great Calcutta Killing. For weeks before this orgy of murder and arson, lethal-looking butchers' knives had been on sale on the pavements all over the city, so that the bloodshed that took place during the second half of August of nineteen-forty-six did not come as any great surprise to the more observant of its inhabitants. Nor can it have

been altogether unexpected to anyone who, like myself, had done social work in the Calcutta of the thirties. Apart from the communal nature of the disturbances, there were the numerous beggar-gangs and the large population of near-destitutes to be reckoned with, as well as the inflammable element provided by the madmen who are bound to be loose on the streets of a city that cannot boast anything in the nature of a mental hospital. Even the lesser forms of violence are enough to make the mentally unstable madder than they would be otherwise and I myself was witness of a sight that served to impress that aspect of things on me with particular force. This was that of a palpably demented man reeling down the centre of a Calcutta roadway, slavering at the mouth. He was so distraught that everyone drew away from him as he approached and so horrifying was his demeanour that one could well believe him fresh from some outrage, such as the setting fire to a building, or the killing of a fellow man.

The food situation threatened meanwhile to become desperate and the nights were made hideous by the shrieks and roars of panic-stricken and infuriated mobs, accompanied after a few days by the incessant grinding clatter of the armoured vehicles that were patrolling the streets in an attempt to restore order. As it happened this was a year when the Calcutta High Court was to close earlier than usual, so that, as there was nothing to keep us in town we decided to get away from it as soon as things settled down. Thus it was that in the last week of August my husband left, as he always did

during at least part of the High Court vacation, for our home in Ranikhet, while I started off for the celebrated centre of advaitist Hinduism which is known as the Ramana Ashram and that is at Tiruvannamalai in North Arcot.

This was the Maharshi Ramana's jubilee year, that is to say, the fiftieth since he had come at the age of fifteen, to the holy Arunachala, the Hill of Light, and pilgrims from all over India were passing through the ashram day after day in order that they might prostrate themselves at his feet.

I had been convinced of the main truths of the Maharshi's teaching some time before this, so that I was able to give due attention to what was going on about me. I had of course never seen anything like it. The only thing to which I could liken it in any way was a pilgrimage at Lourdes which I had come on quite accidentally in the course of a tour in the Pyrenees in the year nineteen-twenty-nine. But there the pilgrims had been the sick in search of the miracle of bodily healing. Here they had no motive beyond that of being for a moment or two in the presence of the realised one in the hope of receiving his grace.

To someone born in the West, where the concept of the sage, as it exists in India, is virtually unknown, what I saw during the five weeks of my stay at Tiruvannamalai was therefore arresting enough, but that which appealed to me more than anything else was the

absence of the solemnity and air of hushed reverence which I had always associated with the religious environment. 'The Maharshi was at one time spoken of as 'The Silent Sage'. He was no longer observing silence while I was there and what struck me was his light-heartedness and the frequency with which he smiled and even laughed. Here was an exponent of a faith which had obviously escaped the persecutions to which Christianity had been subjected throughout its history, not only from its enemies, but from those who should have been its friends.

It was while I was at 'Tiruvannamalai that I was to turn my thoughts for the first time in a really serious sense to the implications of the caste system. I had of course heard many stories of the severity with which caste was once enforced in the more southerly parts of India and I was interested to see that even in so liberal an atmosphere as the Ramana Ashram, restrictions in the matter of eating were duly observed. I sometimes ate my midday meal in the dining-hall of the ashram itself and on two occasions I was bidden to dinner there also. I ate amongst the untouchables, while the Brahmins had their meal behind a curtain which stretched the entire length of the hall. 'The Maharshi ate with us. Born a Brahmin, he had abandoned the sacred thread in accordance with custom at the time of his realisation, for the realised are beyond all considerations of caste or creed.

Despite its purely personal connotations, which may often do much harm, I think it may fairly be said that the caste system has been most ignorantly abused, not only in the sense of being reviled by those to whom it has proved disadvantageous, but by being misused as a weapon of social advancement and oppression. Apart from this it has been in its time not only the most intricate but the most powerful form of social structure known to us. Moreover, based as it was upon moral and spiritual sanctions, it seemed in its day to be almost indestructible, for it was seldom that the advantages of what was known as 'breaking' caste outweighed the disadvantages.

The preservation of the system depended upon a number of religious beliefs, chief amongst which were the doctrines of *karma* and re-birth and the view, universal amongst the Hindus, though expressed in various forms, of the ultimate perfectibility of man. Anything which impeded the union of the individual with the Infinite, either in his present life or in the life to come, was regarded as 'unclean', hence the customs of the Hindu concerning eating, childbirth and death, all three of which were held to relate to the diverse and temporary, therefore 'evil' body. The bond holding these things together in an earthly sense was the mating of the species, so that by means of an age-long observance of the custom of marrying only within a given caste, or, in certain instances, two given castes, it became crystallised and codified.

Nowadays, thanks to the investigations of the

sociologist, the caste system has been made the subject of intensive study, but it has yet to receive the attention it deserves from the eugenicist, for, alone of all the civilised peoples on this globe to-day, the Hindus can show the results of untold ages of racial breeding applied according to the strictest possible set of rules affecting both the moral and material aspects of life.

A eugenical study of the Hindu peoples rewards us with something of much more interest than the mere outcome of physical heredity in that it shows us the effect of the control of human mating on psychological characteristics and special intellectual and manual skills.

The most obvious, because the least complicated example of the first of these types of breeding is evidenced by what is known as the *Kshatriya* or warrior caste. Here we have millions of men and women born in each generation as the summation of thousands of years of intermarriage within the military caste, who have developed as their two main characteristics courage and fearlessness. The results of this is that, practically-speaking, any man or woman of this caste, almost all of whom bear the name of *Singh*, which means *lion*, can be relied upon with few exceptions to be a stranger to the emotion to which we have given the name of fear.

That the results of the age-long breeding by the Hindu for mental and spiritual ascendancy have become a matter of world-wide acceptance is shown by the absorption into the languages of the West of the word

pandit as denoting a man of learning. In India itself the title of Pandit may, properly-speaking, only be applied to one who is a Brahmin by caste. The Brahmin has in fact, from time immemorial mated brain with brain and, however distasteful the acceptance of such a notion may be to the West, the Brahminical caste can show to-day throughout India a superiority of mental capacity that is hard to match anywhere in the world of our time. Here, however, it is necessary to descend to qualification, for so specialised have the limitations of the caste system become that the mental capacity of the Brahmin has itself been strictly canalised, with the result that these brilliant creatures, any one of whom is the absolute mental equal, if not superior, so far as the actual instrument of thinking is concerned, of his brother in the West, are too often only able to apply themselves to the more purely intellectual callings. Thus we have a situation where, until quite recently, though the greatest need in the India of the time, apart from the growing of food, was the scientific disposal of waste matter, not only could no member of the most intelligent of the castes become a sanitary engineer, let alone one who dealt with any aspect of the question of sewage, but he might not even discuss the details of a problem which affects the welfare of every man, woman and child throughout the country.

In the field of the *crafts* the caste system has long led to a degree of specialization which, while producing

skills of an almost miraculous perfection, has brought about an inevitable stagnation where the movement of a particular craft was concerned. This has meant that it is no exaggeration to say that many of the crafts that were to be found in the India of yesterday were unchanged both in style and the methods of their execution from what they were thousands of years ago. This is of course always to some degree true of the craft proper wherever it is found and it is no bad thing from the cultural or any other point of view except that of the *livelihood* of the craftsman concerned, for in these days of a constant rise in the cost of living it becomes every day more difficult for him to compete in a market where mass-produced articles are held to serve as well as those which are the outcome of the very much slower methods which are all he knows.

In India also, and although there were not, as was the case in China, a strict set of conventions governing the execution of a work of art, the art form, except where the artist had fallen under Western influences, repeated itself almost as faithfully as did that of the craft.

The coming to India of the European and especially of the more puritanic type of missionary, resulted in a calamitous decline in inherited skills. Without touching upon religious prejudice more than to contend that it has served first of all to interrupt and so finally to destroy the inheritance of the skills of many of the Hindu traditional musicians, dancers, wood and stone carvers and mural decorators, it is enough to say that the artistic caste calling as such was, in the India of

pre-Independence days, not so much upon its last legs as upon the last and smallest of its toes. It may in fact be said that only those artistic skills which were, so to speak, independent of the limitations of the purely caste calling survived at all. A case in point is *alpana*, for this form of decoration for religious purposes within the dwelling-place is, in some shape or another, the prerogative of all women, irrespective of caste, throughout India.

One of the most noticeable effects of the caste calling upon domestic life is that there has never in Indian society been what is known in the West as the 'handy-man', that is to say, the generally self-taught artisan who can turn his hand to almost anything requiring elementary manual skill. In this connection however it may be noted that we also have the aphorism, 'Jack of all trades and master of none', which would seem to indicate that the possession of such individuals is not an unmixed blessing. In India, where caste rules excluded whole communities from occupying themselves with particular activities, so great was their influence on the minds of the hereditary craftsmen that those who came of a family that wielded a particular tool for its livelihood could never bring themselves to turn to the use of another in times of stress. Thus, too, it was possible to see the tragic spectacle in various parts of India before nineteen-forty-seven, of whole villages of craftsmen at the point of starvation for want of a demand

for their special form of craft. Added, moreover, to the difficulty experienced by all craftsmen and industrial workers in switching from one employment to another, whether on account of inherent personal limitations or trade union regulations, there was in caste, by reason of its spiritual sanctions, a powerful deterrent where change to other occupations was concerned. Thus, since the untouchable or outcaste was considered to be in process of expiating the ignorances of his former lives by means of an unclean occupation, he might not escape from that expiation by turning to a clean trade or calling. In the same way, the twice-born, that is to say the Brahmin and Kshatriya, who were deemed to be far enough on the path to perfection to be capable of attaining to union with the Infinite within the span of their current lives, might not interrupt their progress by turning to an occupation that would render them literally or spiritually unclean.

To the Westerner, born and brought up in traditions that represent to him freedom, but that to the orthodox Hindu seem nothing more nor less than godlessness, these dicta have always appeared unconscionably harsh, but in fact the Brahmin long ago sealed his own fate with his insistence on untouchability, for the material reasons for the extremes of ritual cleanliness have melted away in the light of the knowledge of modern hygiene, and ritual cleanliness in the spiritual sense was always an admission by the individual of a fear of the contamination of evil, which it should have been, but only too often was not, his first aim to overcome.

Nevertheless, in viewing the workings of the caste system from outside it must never be forgotten that escape from its trammels was open to everyone, including the untouchable, by the attainment of spiritual enlightenment. The sage is free of caste and all men may follow yoga irrespective of their position in the social hierarchy. Moreover, some at least of the enlightened hold that after a certain stage in that spiritual advancement which is the prerogative of all men, the disembodied being who is in the state between births can choose the form in which he shall make his reappearance on this earth.

From the foregoing it may be seen how closely interwoven in Indian life is the influence of the life beyond the veil, but how far this faith will survive the chaos of our times is a question.

One of the first results of that piece of juggling with men's lives known as 'partition', was the migration in their thousands of whole communities of hereditary workers with a consequent shortage of, and in many cases the complete absence from, a particular district of essential workers such as washermen and the removers of night-soil. In Bengal, where the fishing industry had been almost wholly in the hands of a particular community a serious shortage was for a long time experienced in what till then had been a staple food of the people, while, because the skilled watchmakers had always been almost wholly Muslim, it was for many a day impossible to get a watch or clock regulated or repaired in Calcutta under a lapse of several months.

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

At all times and in all lands an uprooting of populations must carry in its wake, if not actual bloodshed, the extremes of wretchedness and material injustice. But in India, where the people are tied, as is the case with all peasantries, to the land, they are tied also by that unique concatenation of custom, of rules and regulations and of penalties known as the caste system, to their own particular caste or calling. That this aspect of the uprooting of such a population was apparently not foreseen by those responsible for it, is surely further proof, if proof were needed, of the truth of the Hindu view that foresight is not a function of the instrument we know as the brain of man, but that it belongs to the spheres of spiritual enlightenment.

But the worst aspect of the caste system, as I see it, is the power it has placed in the hands of the trading community. From the moment when the rapacity and unscrupulousness of the first potential nabob met the rapacity and unscrupulousness of the *Vaishya*, the scene was set for the commercial drama which is still being enacted on Indian soil.

I have in my time in Calcutta seen three excellent large department-stores close down. It is true that two of them were housed in uneconomic Edwardian buildings, but the third had relatively up-to-date premises in one of the finest positions in the town.

The small shop-keeper shies away from the idea of the large emporium because it represents a capital outlay

which it is beyond his imagining to provide, as well as a loss of personal power which he would rather have on a modest scale than not at all. Hence we have surviving in a city of the commercial importance of Calcutta shopping centres of the kind for which the East has been famous since the days of Harun-al-Rashid, where, throughout one's time within their precincts one is importuned by every variety of diseased or disabled beggar ; where, unless one has the habit of bargaining and considerable skill at it, as well as limitless time and patience, one is apt to have to pay anything up to one hundred per cent more than one's article of purchase is worth ; where the individual stall can of necessity house only a very limited stock, but where the large number of his trade rivals making it a probability that its owner may never be called upon to serve a particular customer again, he can risk with impunity the passing off on the unwary of ordinarily unsaleable or inferior goods.

As is the case in all those countries where the middle-class springs from a peasantry which is seldom if ever reinforced by the blood of the large landowner, the characteristics of the rural population are still to be found amongst folk who have long been town-dwellers. The meanness amounting to something approaching a paralysis of the will when it comes to parting with money for anything but sheer necessities ; the clinging to primitiveness of living on the part of people otherwise modernised, as exemplified in the failure to encourage the provision of good hotels, travellers' bungalows,

restaurants and eating-houses ; the continuance of the emphasis on a casual hospitality which dates from a time when the visitor had come from a long way off and depended on his host for food and shelter, but that in these days of the rising cost of living, few can afford, as well as the extravagance associated with marriage and other ceremonies which at one time were dependent for their validity on witnesses, but that are now the subject of registration under the law ; the failure to understand the advantages both to the individual and to the country as a whole, of investment in government securities as opposed to the burial of wealth in the shape of gold, silver and precious stones which may never again see the light of day ; the disregard of the need for punctuality as a path to the respect and affection of one's fellow men ; the so-called bazar mentality with its refusal to recognise the convenience and fairness of the fixed price ; the widespread illiteracy of an educated community which still regards the buying of books as an indefensible extravagance ; the resistance to new ideas and last, but by no means least, the persistence of a patriarchal tyranny which brings nothing but domestic misery in its train, are some of the signs that a large part of the middle classes has not yet emancipated itself from the outlook of the village, with its lack of book-learning, its eternal fear of natural forces and its preoccupation with the need of a sufficient manpower to cultivate the land.

This is not to say that the Indian peasant is not a most splendid person in his own sphere as so many who have had good servants and who have commanded

troops or seamen, or who know the agriculturalist against the background of village life, can testify from their hearts. But the characteristics such as patience under the extremes of adversity, a supreme physical courage and a gift for personal devotion, which rank as virtues in a life of constant struggle, have a way of becoming sterile under the conditions of life in the modern town.

It can easily be understood and therefore condoned that where people whose lives have all along been concerned with fundamentals, as is the case with the peasant, should react in the opposite direction and become superficial and careless when they encounter the relatively easy conditions of life in a town. There can surely be no other explanation of the failure of the municipal authorities in a city such as Calcutta to give adequate attention to the basic needs of the population. For instance, the problem of the water supply which is being felt to-day in some degree in nearly all the great urban centres of the world, is specially urgent where the mean temperature lies within the nineties and where the people have an unusually high standard of personal cleanliness. That this has been fully realised by the Union Government of India is evidenced by the priority that has been given by them to the great river projects, but it would seem that it has not yet dawned on the various Indian municipalities that they too have their part to play in raising the living standards of the people in this respect.

In the beautiful eighteenth-century house in Middleton Street in which my husband and I were

fortunate enough to spend nearly the whole of our married life, we each had a bathroom to ourself. Mine was a most pleasing little apartment, for, unlike most of the smaller rooms in the houses of this date where the height is almost always too great for the floor area, it was a perfect architectural cube. Unfortunately, however, for the last four years of our tenancy of the upper part of this lovely house, we were without a drop of the unfiltered water which is used in Calcutta for sanitary purposes.

To the freshly translated villager I have no doubt but that the very idea of the possession of a private bathroom is, like the buying of books, an indefensible luxury. A luxury it undoubtedly is, but except to those who are altogether indifferent to the march of civilization it can hardly be regarded as indefensible. In fact it is to her association with India that Great Britain owes her domestic bathing habits. The nabobs may have failed their fellow men in all sorts of ways, but they did bring back to England the custom of the daily or twice-daily bath. England used to be as unwashen as most of the rest of Europe and even I, who am no more than just past my mid-sixties, can remember otherwise perfectly-equipped houses in London with either no bathroom at all or with one that had only recently been installed.

I have often wondered what construction can be put by the Indian student when unaided by the learned note, upon that episode in Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar' where Caesar faints away upon finding himself

surrounded by a Roman crowd. This is of course one of Shakespeare's more glaring anachronisms, for the Romans were bathers, while the Elizabethans were not. However, the disagreeably unbathed crowd is still to be found over a great part of the continent of Europe, or was when I was last there.

The scrupulous cleanliness of the orthodox Hindu with his ritual bathing before meals, has always been to the non-Indian a wonder and delight, yet, used as the Hindu is to the inexhaustible supply of water of India's great rivers, no one on earth is more wasteful of the water which is brought to him in a pipe. The person who is guilty of failing to turn off a tap after usage is only too commonly to be found in this land of bathers, but that may be excused in those who are newcomers to the idea of the art of plumbing. It is quite otherwise however with owners or lessees of what are known as 'pukka' houses and I have often observed with horror the way in which cisterns, that is to say domestic tanks, are permitted to overflow for hours and even days and nights on end. Apart from the selfishness which is inherent in a waste of water that is in short supply in hundreds of households in the town, it seems to occur to nobody that where there is no pipe to carry the overflow away, the constant seeping of water through a roof, however strongly constructed and therefore resistant to flooding it may be, is bound sooner or later to cause an irreparable amount of structural damage to the house beneath.

When I first came to Calcutta in nineteen-thirty-two

there was a thing which I suppose to have been known as the *garbage train*. This consisted of a number of open trucks drawn by a locomotive which passed along a railway line that ran for some distance along the Upper Circular Road and that mercifully disappeared into the hinterland of Tangra to be tipped I believe into barges on the canal. This horrible method of the disposal of waste matter meant that the train passed not only dwellings by the score, but open food-stalls and eating-houses. It can at least be said that this infernal contraption disappeared suddenly from the scene, but in the period that followed the garbage disposal in the city left everything to be desired.

For those members of the population who were lucky enough to be able to travel everywhere by car, it was possible to avoid encountering the full impact of the stench that arose from the huge mounds of uncollected garbage that lay all over the town. For some reason or other, which I can no longer recollect, I was doomed to walk about in the town a good deal at that time and it seemed to me, so desperate at the seeming lack of care on the part of the Corporation for the barest decencies of civic administration did we all become, that the only way in which its duties to the public could be brought home to it would be for one of its members to be *chained* night and day to a spot adjacent to each of those putrescent heaps. In due course, however, the worst problems of garbage disposal seem to have been solved, so that I am glad to be able to report that in spite of the present-day overcrowding

in the town there has been a marked improvement in this direction since Independence.

It is very noticeable to the student of English social history that the decline in* and almost complete disappearance of the corruption which was so evident in England up to the end of the eighteenth-century, exactly coincided with the industrial revolution, the subsequent passing of laws for the protection of labour with its consequent increase in social security, and the rise of an enormous and for the most part highly intelligent and integritous middle class. Nevertheless, in the England of our time, in direct descent from the chivalric age with its insistence on personal honour but almost universal illiteracy, *thought* is still looked upon as a second-class commodity. Meanwhile, and this is of extreme moment in considering the contrasts between the two peoples, India has never ceased to differentiate between her trading classes and her *intelligentzia*. The mistake made by the French revolutionaries and indeed by most of the revolutionaries of modern times, of bunching together as *bourgeoisie* all who were not recognisably either peasants or aristocrats, is not likely to be repeated in India so long as the products of the brain continue to be valued in general above material success.

I came back to Calcutta to find that my husband had been obliged during his time in Ranikhet to take legal steps to prevent the closing down of our local club. This entailed a much bigger sacrifice on his part that

can be realised by anyone not a lawyer. To begin with it meant a very great interruption to his ordinary professional life. It also led to a considerable amount of unpopularity for him and myself within the British community in India at large. This closing down of clubs on the grounds that, having been founded by the British they could rightly be looked upon as the property of the Britishers who were still in India, was taking place all over the country. Some of these clubs possessed ample funds, so that those who were interested in securing their closure were likely to benefit financially. The Ranikhet Club suit was destined to become what is known as a 'leading' case, so in the January of the following year, my husband and I went to Allahabad where it was down for hearing before a full bench consisting of the Chief Justice and two Puisne Judges of what were then still the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.

As judgment was not likely to be delivered for some months it was considered advisable that someone should be in Ranikhet to see that no one got up to some trick or other to defeat the ends of justice in the meantime. Accordingly I now went to our hill home to keep an eye on things.

It was during my next few months in Ranikhet that I came more directly into touch with the missionary view of Hinduism than I had encountered before. Throughout the first part of my time in India, that is

to say until I came by my own wish to be looked upon as having 'embraced' Hinduism, I had been more or less closely associated with and in individual cases on terms of friendship with, a large number of missionaries of all sects, but it was only now that I saw with unmistakable clarity that their failure to make converts amongst the educated in India to the teachings of Christ, was in direct proportion to their failure to understand Vedanta.

It seemed to me quite simply that if Christ had been represented to the Indian mind as the *guru* most needed in the West of our time, instead of, as he always is, as the only receptacle in this and any other age of 'Truth', he would have taken his rightful place in the Indian spiritual hierarchy.

I saw too that the unfortunate thing where the Christian missionary is concerned is that anyone in India can turn round and point out to him that as Christendom has never properly understood the teachings of its guru, it has never been able to follow them : for it can hardly be denied that since there has never been in Christendom the conception of *ahimsa*, Christ's injunction regarding the turning of the other cheek has in the West been almost wholly ignored, with the result that, as its history can so grievously show, it has been plunged during the last two thousand years in one disastrous war after another.

How far India has ever appreciated the amount of courage it requires of us in the West to abstain from the paths of violence and cruelty even to the extent of

practising vegetarianism or of condemning such things as capital punishment and blood sports, is difficult to tell. It is certainly not persuasive enough to point out to persons who are convinced of the necessity of all three of these things that those who hold with them in the West are looked upon as cranks, or that an assault upon a fellow-being as redress for insult, or the bullying of one boy by another at school or on board ship are regarded as permissible if not laudable in lands where the extraction of evidence by torture, not to speak of the duel, were things of yesterday and where the burning at the stake for heresy was a commonplace of the day before that, for such ideas are as foreign to the mind of the average Hindu as they are to the more modern-minded Englishman.

Christianity has in fact struggled for its mere continuance in circumstances which must be very difficult for any Hindu to imagine. Owing to the break in its traditions and the consequent ignorance on the part of the average Christian of what Christ's teachings really meant, there was ever present in the supporters of the Church a fear that what appeared to them to be *heresy* would destroy even that which remained of the tradition. Hence the terrible penalties imposed by the Church throughout the Middle Ages on those who deviated from its doctrines and the retaliatory persecutions which followed the Reformation and that persisted in some form or another until relatively modern times.

India has been blamed for being what is known as

neutral in international affairs, but the word is inexpressive of her real attitude, for India is *ahimsic* and *ahimsa* is as much more than *non-violence* as *karma* is than *fate*. Ahimsa covers a very wide field indeed in that it demands no less from the individual than complete personal control. Wherefore, too, there is not so much in India the spirit of tolerance as the absence of intolerance, which is not by any means the same thing.

Then again, what we have of the teachings of the spiritually enlightened in general have always been addressed to people with some kind of existing metaphysical background. This was undoubtedly the case with Christianity, for as Christ's teaching was directed mainly if not entirely towards the Jews, he will not have found it necessary to allude to a conception of the after-life that must have been familiar to every one of his hearers. Even the early Christian missionaries who undertook to carry the words of the teacher to the Northern peoples of Europe found a primitive metaphysical system wherever they went. In fact, one of the most difficult tasks Christendom was to set itself was the stamping out of the remains of the Nordic mythology in the Baltic countries and that of the Graeco-Roman peoples in the lands bordering the Mediterranean.

Hinduism, on the other hand, much older and much wiser and with a body of scripture, both immense and almost wholly anonymous, has never attempted to upset the beliefs of anyone at all. Thus it is possible to find, not only in India, but within the orbit of

Hinduism, those with such apparently disparate forms of worship as that of Kali and of Krishna for, welding Hinduism into one indissoluble whole. are the beliefs in karma, re-birth and the ultimate perfectibility of man.

What Jesus Christ thought, or shall we say *knew*, about the after-life we can only guess. We have a very small part of his teachings and any verbal tradition that might have survived under more humane conditions was broken once and for all by the wholesale massacres of his followers that took place under the later Roman emperors.

There are strong indications in the New Testament, however, that he was what is known in India as a *yogi*. The words: '*The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light*' is a purely yogic saying, one which can in fact only have a clear and unmistakable meaning for those who practise along yogic lines.

Another of Christ's injunctions which receives at least as strong an emphasis in Hindu teachings is: '*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*' for the Hindu is strictly enjoined to live in the present, that is to say, to refrain from dwelling, *to the exclusion* of the here and now, upon time past and time to come.

Then again, that he had also taken, or was about to take *sannyas* is evident from the words: '*Woman what*

have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come, which he addressed to his mother during the marriage in Cana when she pointed out to him that there was no wine for the wedding-feast. As anyone who has got below the surface in India may recognise, this remark, which must have been a stumbling-block to many a Christian, will have been made with a smile the warmth of which will have robbed it of any sting it might otherwise have had. Amongst the sanyasin's vows at the time of his renunciation of the things of this world is that of a farewell to personality and therefore to all those relationships depending on ties of blood, but this does not necessarily imply separation ; rather does it mean a widening of understanding and charity to include all men, in other words, *love*. This is known in Hinduism by the more negative term *non-attachment*.

Still another conception which is absent from what we have of Christian teaching is a clear distinction, such as is made in Hinduism, between the worshipper and he who submits his religious ideas to the processes of thought. The terms used in this connection are *bhakti* and *jnan* respectively. The result of this absence of a differentiation between these two types of approach to the metaphysical world is that the thinking part of the peoples of the West tend to turn away from religion altogether and to become what are known as agnostics or unbelievers, which is, to say the least of it, a pity.

In the years since Independence I have often been

asked what have been the most noticeable changes I have had the opportunity of observing in the Indian scene during my time in India. This is a very difficult question to answer, since India is above all a land of paradoxes. For instance, although the Hindu is, in intention at least, the cleanest person in the world, he is content to live in what are often far from clean surroundings. Again, India is par excellence the home of religious meditation, yet in ordinary life, privacy and the solitude of the individual, so much prized in the West, are almost unknown. But perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of the India of our time, is that this, the most spiritually and philosophically enlightened people the world has so far seen, has never been able to attract to her shores anyone nearer the thinker *per se* than the Christian missionary. Nevertheless, since it is discourteous to leave unanswered a question which is asked in all good faith and in expectation of an intelligent reply, I should say that the outstanding changes I have observed in the last twenty-eight years are the decline in epidemic disease, especially malaria; the final breakdown of the more rigid aspects of the caste system and what appears to be a true awakening to the advantages of democratic government. There is no need, since it has been so finely documented by one of the men chiefly responsible for it, to allude to the integration of the Indian States, but I am not at all sure that this astonishing piece of statecraft, conducted as it was in an almost wholly peaceful atmosphere, is not far and

away the most important event that has taken place during these years.

I wish I could include in my list an improvement in the position of women. That there has been an improvement here is undeniable. In the thirties, when I first came to India, it was a rarity to see a respectable Indian woman walking in the streets of her cities : to-day it is a commonplace. But what remains, and what I particularly deplore, is that her women, in spite of the granting to them of the franchise, are still not citizens in the fullest sense of the word.

In saying this I am not holding myself out as a feminist. On the contrary, I regard every woman who is content, as many of them are, to remain in the semi-purdah which is still largely in force amongst middle-class Hindus as no less than 'a millstone hangéd about the neck' of her menfolk.

The average middle-class Indian woman, apart from the bearing of children, of which she might not seldom advantageously do less, hardly ever takes her proper share of the responsibilities of family life. A shriek of protest will, I know, go up at this statement, not only from the feminists, but from the die-hard section of Hindu male society that thinks of the ideal Hindu wife and mother as an anonymous bundle : but I have worked too long in India side by side with men not to be fully aware of the implications of what I say. I would even go so far as to contend that it will only be when women are given more responsibility and are moreover encouraged to take it, that any real improvement

can be expected to come about in the public life of the land.

It will be argued that the women of India are now fully emancipated and indeed the passing of recent legislation has immensely improved their position in a great many ways. But the fact remains that there are still countless thousands of them who never know what it is to spend money on their own requirements, or even to handle money at all. In this connection and speaking from the point of view of neither man nor woman, but as one who feels for both, I may say that one of the most significant sights I have seen since I came to India was that of a group of well-fed Indian gentlemen of the trading kind, who would have been better occupied seated at their desks, engaged in the Newmarket in Calcutta in buying the underclothing for the female members of their family from a member of their own sex.

More intelligent on the spiritual level than any other individual on earth, the Indian male is often singularly foolish when it comes to purely mundane matters, especially those that most affect his own well-being. Thus it is, that in every civilised country in the world, save India, the women of the house do the domestic shopping, and in every country of the world which can rank as in the slightest degree forward-looking, the women are in a position to demand that they shall be supplied with such labour-saving devices as lie within the family means and are designed to leave them free to carry out duties that in India fall to the lot of the unfortunate male.

It is to be hoped that things are changing with due rapidity in this respect, but it cannot be denied that there are still vast numbers of men in the cities of the country who are obliged to do the marketing for the household before leaving for their day's work ; who, if any member of the family needs to be taken to hospital, must ask their employers for a day off in order to devote themselves to the endless wait that a visit to the out-patients' department at any of the city's hospitals invariably entails ; and who, if some matter demands the attention of their womenfolk in the ancestral village, even if it is something the women could handle quite easily on their own account, must break off what they are doing so as to escort them to their destination and must wait in order to bring them home again. Only someone who has worked in an office, shop or factory in a subsidiary capacity knows what it can mean of anxiety and humiliation to have to ask for this kind of privilege from a perhaps not very good-tempered or sympathetic head of a department who, in his turn, is put to very great inconvenience by the absence, even for a day, of a trusted member of his staff.

Arising out of this same question of the virtual enslavement of women is what can only be called the extraordinarily low standard of Indian domestic life. One of the first things that struck me on my arrival in India and that continued to strike me nearly every time I went into an Indian home; was the lack in it of both

comfort and taste. In the beginning I was inclined to attribute these two lacks to poverty, but poverty did not account for the fact that wherever I went the pictures hung askew on the walls and that every glass surface within sight was dirty.

Meanwhile, the odd thing was that what I saw was a way of living that did not accord with the standards that seemed to me requisite for the civilised life, yet many of the houses into which I went were the homes of substantial professional men who, in the land from I had lately come, would have ranked as what are known as 'gentlemen'. My bewilderment was to be complete when I was presently to be taken to a large old family house in the middle of Calcutta which was so neglected in every way as to be little more than a barrack, but the owners of which were next door to millionaires.

After I had been in the country for ten years or so, I evolved a theory for myself to account for a state of things which I could not think of as being otherwise than unworthy of so civilised a people as I knew the Indians to be. This was that untold centuries of child marriage, combined with incarceration behind the purdah for the girls from the age of puberty and onwards, had reduced the womenfolk of the country to a state where they not only had no chance of becoming mature human beings, but where they had no opportunity of making comparisons between their own domestic arrangements and those of any household outside the circle of their immediate relations. That this theory of mine has at least a partial validity I still hold, but as the

result of a closer acquaintance with the customs of the Indian villager, according to which child marriage, but not purdah, is the rule, I saw that my generalisation could only apply in its totality to the middle-classes. This same greater knowledge of the habits of the peasantry certainly supplied an answer to the question why glass surfaces were not kept clean. It was that here, as in all hot countries, because the dwellings of the poorer countrymen never have windows, the Indian servant overlooks the necessity of glass-cleaning as a whole. Furthermore, to harp on what in an entirely man-run world' would appear to be a trifle, the question of cleaning materials would appear to be neglected. Dusters and glass-cloths, which in India have a way of being herded together under the generic name *jharan* and that are used indiscriminately as either, are relatively expensive to buy and boring to think about and I would hazard a guess that it is only where the womenfolk in a household have the chief say in the domestic expenditure that such dreary objects receive their due meed of attention.

Complete purdah, which under the pressure of economic circumstances has largely died out but that in the India of my early days was still a factor to be reckoned with, is a perfectly satisfactory form of existence for two types of women, the social sloth and the natural-born saint. How far their sequestration from the world was responsible for a certain lack of enterprise in their male children is hard to determine, but certain it is that there has been a blessed diminution in the last

few years in the number of job-hunting young men of the kind who used so frequently to be brought by their fathers to our flat in the hope that my husband would be able to secure jobs for them and who, on being asked what sort of employment they had in mind for themselves would reply : 'That, sir, is for you to say !' upon which, while my husband was still speechless from the impact of this remark, the father would add in the tone of one giving a peerless recommendation : 'I must tell you, sir, that my son has never been allowed to travel by 'bus or train without an escort'.

I am not for one moment contending that under present conditions the Indian woman can suddenly take her proper place in the social scheme. It would be cruelty to expect it. But I do say that if Hindu society is to cease to be as badly balanced as it is now, this should be a major aim. For one thing, the assumption of greater responsibility by the feminine part of the population would also call for a drastic reform in the matter of the timing of meals. If the women were to have to do the household shopping early in the morning, as is necessary wherever all perishable eatables are sold in markets as opposed to shops, they would get very little bodily rest if the present arrangement were adhered to whereby they may not eat until the menfolk have finished their meal. This custom will have been absolutely reasonable in the days when, judging by what remains of India's original social structure, life was governed by the single aim of the attainment by everyone of selflessness. but in modern times, when the desire for entertainment

is apt to supplant worthier instincts, it may be midnight or later before the women of the house can permit themselves to take the last meal of the day.

It can no doubt be said of most social systems that have withstood the test of time that the good in them outweighs that which is bad. The Hindu joint family system is a case in point. I am even inclined to go so far as to give support to the theory which I have often heard expounded, that had it not been for its caste and joint family systems Indian society would have had a poor chance of survival.

As with the institution of caste, the Hindu joint family system, depended for its validity in days gone by upon religious sanctions. Theoretically it does so still, but it would seem to be only here and there that it is nowadays to be found existing in practice in anything like its pure state.

In a society where everyone had as his aim the perfecting of his own inner being, the home must automatically have been a specially holy place. I am aware that one of the signs of our times is that the word 'holy' has become suspect if not actually debased, but in the connection in which it has just been used it should be taken as meaning serene, harmonious, inspiring, in short, *happy*. The elders will have been respected because their lives had been directed towards the goal of ultimate perfection and because the mere turning of their faces in that direction will have created in them a humility that will have made them easy to live with. True Hinduism is utterly incompatible with that curse

of modern life, the love of power, so that at a given moment the older folk will have handed over the reins of management which had hitherto been theirs to the members of the family who were still in the householder stage, while they themselves retired to an advisory position.

I have once or twice since I have been in India seen homes in which this traditional way of life was being observed and to me the scene that was thus conjured up resembled what was probably the most ideal social system that this world has known. Mutual trust was the keynote and so great was the respect and affection of the younger members of the family for their parents and grandparents and of the latter for their children and grandchildren that it seemed as though none of the ordinary rubs of daily life could ever affect them.

Admittedly this delightful state of things is hard to establish and harder still to maintain in a world where the pleasure to be obtained from material objects and sensual experience has largely superseded the far more lasting enjoyments that are the outcome of the adventures of the mind. To the modern the words *resignation* and *acceptance* denote lack of ambition, than which nothing to him can be more contemptible, but in the meantime he is restless and unhappy without knowing why.

The good aspect of the joint family which has survived is of course that it provides a measure of financial security for all its members irrespective of what they themselves bring to it in terms of money or labour and that in doing so it demands from those who furnish

the means of its upkeep a very great degree of unselfishness and devotion to duty. This aspect of the system is a never-failing source of astonishment to those who come to India from lands where the care of the non-earner, whether he be debarred by physical or mental incapacity or old age from working for gainful ends, devolves on the State. I should find it difficult to estimate with any hope of accuracy the number of times I have heard a Britisher remark with unfeigned admiration upon the uncomplaining way in which his or her servants or other employes send home a part of their earnings each month.

In those times when the family constituted not only a unit from the point of view of society in general, but a social circle beyond the orbit of which it was never necessary for its individual members to move, the conditions prevailing within the family dwelling-place were taken for granted and such drawbacks as resulted from the close association of large numbers of persons of all ages beneath a single roof were looked upon as being in the nature of things and therefore no matter for complaint.

Nowadays, however, with the greater knowledge that is available to almost the whole of mankind as to how its fellow-creatures conduct their lives, many sides of traditional Hindu domesticity have begun to irk those who would formerly have accepted them without question.

The young people of to-day, for instance, are not nearly so ready as were their seniors to tolerate a situation

where the lazier and more incompetent members of the family are allowed to batten upon the exertions of the more active and cleverer ones: nor are they able to see how it benefits anybody to endure without protest the frightening increase in the numbers beneath the ancestral roof which results from a refusal to recognise the disadvantages to the family as a whole of too many children to feed, clothe, educate and marry.

But perhaps that which is still more destructive of acquiescence in the old ways, is the growing desire amongst the younger folk for a privacy which in the middle-class joint family home is impossible to obtain, for they have come to see that without privacy there is no freedom and that without freedom there is no chance for the individual to develop his talents or even to indulge his personal tastes.

One of the things about the India of to-day which must strike the foreign observer with particular force is the very small output per head of the educated portion of the population of original writing and works of art. But what the foreign observer is not as a rule privileged to see with his own eyes and that therefore he cannot realise, is the intense difficulty under which the member of the joint family is doomed to labour when it comes to the desire to give rein to anything in the nature of individual creativeness. In this matter I too can speak from the heart, for although I myself have never been fated to live in a large Hindu joint family, the general disregard in India for the privacy that we in the West regard as a right, has meant that until quite recently,

when I learnt the trick of it, I have been quite unable to exercise such talents as I possess.

Early in my time in Calcutta I published a small book on the life of Ernest Dowson, the poet of the nineties, and I had brought out with me when I came an unfinished manuscript, a novel, which I hoped to be able to work at in the peaceful atmosphere of my own home. It is true that I eventually finished this novel, but it took me ten years to get to the end with the result that it is far from being up to standard. One of the things I had not bargained for was that in the hot climate of Calcutta nobody ever thinks of shutting a door. This means that every room through which any other room can be reached is in fact a passage. The one in which I purported to work in our flat in Middleton Street lay between my husband's study and the verandah and it was of quite ordinary occurrence for some total stranger to stroll through my room on his way from one to the other. The first time this happened I was too much astonished even to remark on it. I was still only partially dressed and it seemed to me that if I were to draw the intruder's attention to the fact that he was walking through my room it would be embarrassing for us both, so I said nothing. Incidentally, I should explain that there were other ways of reaching the verandah from my husband's study, but my room must have seemed the most obvious one.

In my case, however, it was not so much that privacy could not have been attained as that I was prevented from long-established custom from being ruthless enough

to demand it. The fact that I was trying my utmost to concentrate upon that most difficult of all forms of writing, the composition of a novel, was not regarded by anybody, whether a workman who had come to carry out some quite trivial repair, a tallyman with something to sell, or an acquaintance who wanted to fill up an idle hour or so with chat, as of sufficient importance to warrant a refusal on my part to be interrupted. We had excellent servants, but not one of them could be induced to say that I was not at home when in fact I was sitting at my desk struggling to recapture the mood in which I had been last time I had succeeded in getting down a few pages of my narrative.

I found that the only way in which I could fend off the unwanted visitor was by pretending to be asleep, but that of course was an act of sheer desperation. In the meantime too there was the telephone, which could never be disregarded not to mention the ubiquitous *chit*.

The lack of privacy is not the sole reason why the amount of literary and artistic endeavour that is taking place in the country to-day is so minute in comparison with the talent that obviously exists but that is perforce lying untapped. All creative activity requires an initial period of training, either at the hands of some other person, or at those of the would-be creator himself. Even a talent which is so great as to deserve the name of genius seldom springs full-fledged from its possessor without at least some years of experiment and hard work. But training costs money if only in the form of

the time that has to be spent on it; and here again as the first duty of the individual member of the joint family is to the family and not to himself, he almost always has to set aside his personal inclinations where the means by which he should earn his livelihood is concerned wherever they seem to clash with the interests of the family as a whole.

Contrary to the expectations of the doctors who had attended my husband during his first heart attack, he lived on for a further nine years. He had always said that he wanted to die in harness and although after nineteen-forty-four he was well aware of the danger in which he stood of sudden death, he was determined to go on working as long as possible. As was only to be expected however his health in those last nine years was none too good, it was not therefore so great a shock to us as it would otherwise have been when, in the August of nineteen-fifty-three he suffered a second onset of coronary thrombosis while on a Railway Rates case in Madras and died after a few days' illness in the Willingdon Nursing Home in that city.

His friends have often asked me what my husband thought of my conversion to Indian philosophical ideas. This is not an easy question to answer out of hand. It must I think always be a matter of anxiety to one or other of the partners in a marriage when one and not the other takes the first steps upon the spiritual path. Soon after we were married, I being then in the wilderness

as far as such things were concerned, I experienced a considerable degree of disquiet upon hearing my husband say that he thought it quite probable that he would end his days on the banks of the Ganges. He was at that time being instructed in hatha yoga, but because of his age no less than the demands of his professional life he was prevented from going beyond the stage of acquiring the more elementary *asanas*.

I had known my husband first when I was a child of seven and he was twenty and a Cambridge undergraduate and from that time onwards there was always telepathy between us. He read law at the university and was called to the bar in nineteen-fourteen, but on the outbreak of war he joined the army as a subaltern, to rise to the rank of colonel before its end, yet one of my earliest recollections of him is of hearing him say that he was deeply interested in metaphysics.

Looking back from my present standpoint I am able to see that these things were more significant than they appeared to be at the time, especially when I recall that it had been he and not I who had suggested in nineteen-forty-six that I should visit the Ramana Ashram in Tiruvannamalai. Moreover, two years before his death he began to sit with great ardour at the feet of a guru and it will, I know, be as much of a satisfaction to his admirers to learn, as it was for me to see, that he was in due course to begin to read that which is surely the greatest philosophical work of our time, or as some of us think of any time, Aurobindo Ghosh's 'The Life Divine'.

In the last few weeks that we were to be together

he sat alone in the dining-room of our house at Ranikhet, deep in the study of this book and after a day or two he came to me and said: 'Skipper, I've got to page forty and I've understood every word of it!' I can never remember to have seen on his face a look of such pure happiness or of such triumph as it bore at that moment.

I was now for the first time in my life absolutely alone, so that when I was presently to be given a chance of employment in a firm where my special qualifications were in demand I jumped at it, though not without strong misgivings. I had seen altogether too much of the unemployment amongst the educated in India and of the exploitation of the individual to which it has given rise to be at all easy in my mind when it came to taking a salaried post where I should be working by the side of employes who would all be senior to me in regard to length of service if nothing else. It was true that I was being offered no privileges beyond those they were enjoying, nor could I hope for any kind of future in the firm, but I had none of their family responsibilities and I should therefore have felt little surprise if they had resented my presence in their midst. I need not have worried. In thinking that I might be regarded as an interloper I had left out of account the warm-heartedness and generosity of the middle-class Indian towards anyone who tries to understand his problems.

Ever since I had been on the staff of the Bank of England I had felt a warm sympathy for what is known

in England as the 'white collar worker'. I had left the Bank as I have said to go to a mercantile firm where the male employes of military age were being called up and as I knew that my employment would cease at the end of the war I was to a great extent prepared to take things as I found them. I was still in the early twenties, which is a time of life when one is content to undergo a certain amount of discomfort and even hardship and this was war-time, nevertheless I was appalled by the conditions under which we were called upon to work. The office premises were said to have been in their day the Lord Mayor's stables, but if this was true it must have been a very long time ago, for in the course of ages they had been encompassed on all sides by enormously higher buildings, the shortest of which was a tall eighteenth-century dwelling-house, now let out as offices, which faced directly on the street. We were therefore like creatures at the bottom of a well, the only access for whom to the outside world was a passage-way beneath the same eighteenth-century building. It was by means of this passage too that such air as percolated into our dingy though picturesque counting-house was able to find its way. It was here that I spent my days between the July of nineteen-sixteen and the January of nineteen-nineteen and it was here that I learnt both what I know of the routine of a commercial office and of the life of the white collar worker.

The clerk is a very much more important member

of society both individually and en masse than seems generally to be recognised, though this is something that many organisations and even nations must have discovered of late years to their cost. This is particularly true of the bank clerk, for it is upon good banking methods that a large part of a nation's commercial prosperity depends. Owing to the severities of the caste system, India has bred as fine a body of office workers as the world can show, yet Calcutta has lately been spoken of as a 'city of processions' and it is this body which forms the bulk of those which have earned it this name.

How much of labour unrest in Calcutta as it affects the office worker is due to the too great discrepancy between the remuneration of the people at the top and of those lower down; how much to the sense of frustration on the part of the individual of talents which he is aware of possessing but for which under the conditions of work in the average office he can find no outlet and how much to the residential and transport difficulties which beset everyone who is not a car-owner in that city, are questions that should receive a great deal more attention than they do. They are questions that have a peculiar urgency in a country such as India, where even the lower-paid clerk nearly always has far higher educational and technical qualifications than his counterpart elsewhere, but who, like the private soldier of the past who used to be encouraged to bear his woes by being told that he held a marshal's baton in his knapsack, is perfectly well aware that only by the rarest stroke of fortune can he hope to rise above the general rut.

There is something else. It is something which I feel sure is not generally known in Europe, for I cannot help thinking that if it were it would long ago have given rise to an outcry from all right-thinking people, since it is neo-nabobbery with a vengeance. It is this. Because an individual happens to have been in a position to accept employment in India *while he was still on European soil* and although he may never have been in India and be totally ignorant of Indian conditions, he is not only paid at a vastly higher rate than his Indian opposite number, but is afforded every conceivable privilege including free medical attention of the most skilled kind for himself and his family (if he has one); anything up to a year's 'home' leave on full pay with first-class fares back and forth for himself and his family (again if he has one); an ingenious form of extortion known as 'commission' which in the case of a wealthy firm may amount in any given year to lakhs; special advantages when it comes to his gratuity and provident fund and last but by no means least, extremely favourable arrangements in respect of his domestic expenses amounting in certain instances to the payment by the firm of his rent, his transport, his club bills and the wages of his servants. Needless to say, not one of these things can be hoped for by the ordinary clerk, nor in any but the largest and wealthiest firms by the uncovenanted assistant.

It is only fair to point out, for it is something which is too often forgotten by the enemies of capitalism, that it is not only the employe who is victimised in this way,

but the shareholder, who may thus have been made a party against his will and conscience to a state of things which he deplores but has no means of rectifying. Moreover, there are firms where the employes are permitted to hold a limited number of shares each, but are denied the one privilege that is granted to the shareholder, that of being able to vote at the firm's annual general meeting. Meanwhile, their shares are only too often held in trust for them by one of the persons whose interest it is to see that they should not be in a position to criticise the financial policy of the firm, an individual at the top whose agreement with the company has been drawn up and signed in Europe.

I know I shall be told that all this could be dealt with in a manner satisfactory to both parties if the matters complained of were ventilated by one or more of the shareholders in the course of the annual general meeting. In principle this is so, but who, in practice, is prepared to face the kind of row that such a representation would evoke? Moreover, under present conditions the results of such a protest are a foregone conclusion. So long as those at the top are able to show a sufficiently satisfactory balance-sheet the average director is not going to make himself unpopular by digging below the surface of the firm's affairs.

It was during this period of employment in Calcutta that I was able to observe more closely than ever before the changes in the social life of the town and so of

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

India in general which had taken place not only since Independence, but in the period of my time in India.

It would seem to be a rule that whenever a people copies the habits and culture of another race it is sure to take hold of some of their worser aspects and, side by side with the decay of the caste system has been a failure to realise that something must be found in substitution for it, that in fact what is urgently called for is a development of individual taste and judgment.

In this interim period Indian society has become far too much of a hotch-potch, hence the startling increase of vulgarity in the entertainment world and some at least of the indiscipline amongst the young, for what father of a family who spends more than a very occasional evening viewing the primitive obscenity that passes for dancing in too many of our places of entertainment to-day, can hope to remain worthy of respect in the eyes of his adolescent sons and daughters? In the years in which I have been in India I have seen a change-over from a reticence where the human form was concerned which was a sure sign of inner and spiritual grace and that was therefore a delight to the Westerner, sated as he is with bodily exhibitionism, to a tolerance of a nudity of the most provocative and degraded kind.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that in their sense of outrage at what they see of the present-day entertainment world, the more moderate-minded amongst us are apt to be driven to the opposite

extreme. This causes an inevitable widening of the breach between old and young. The elderly devotee of classical music for instance, is given to overlooking the fact that a great deal of so-called jazz is musically-speaking very interesting and that many of the exponents of this type of music are, to say the least of it, accomplished performers.

In the same way, though many of the films that make their appearance on the Indian screen are both meretricious and mawkish, it must not be forgotten that, faulty as they are, they represent that world of romance to which any young person worth his salt craves entry.

Where the film is concerned I admit myself biassed, for I regard it as having been in its time not merely the greatest invention for the propagation of knowledge since printing, but the most potent force we have ever had for the stimulation of the imaginations of that large section of mankind which for one reason or other is unable to benefit from the written word. Here again, it has to be borne in mind that it is not only the uneducated who are illiterate, but that large part of the populations of the modern world that has either been sickened of reading by having had too much of it in youth, or that is not in a position to obtain books.

Born as I was in Christendom, I see in Hinduism a body of ideas that arose at a time when man was still capable of purity of thought and that has continued without a break throughout his existence on this earth.

To me, therefore, Hinduism represents the sum-total of such spiritual wisdom as may be attained by the ordinary human being with his limited powers of apprehension and reasoning. I would lay stress on the words *without a break*, because in spite of many invasions by less enlightened bodies of men than themselves, the fundamentals of Hinduism have been handed down from generation to generation in such a way as to have made it impossible for the Indian peoples of any period of time to say of them that they were not true. By the fundamentals I must be taken to mean the doctrines of karma and of re-birth.

I have sometimes tried to place myself in the position of someone born in Hinduism who is trying, as are so many Hindus of to-day, to adopt a way of life which is founded upon the belief that man has only one life on this earth. The results of this effort of his are easy enough to see. In all the cities of India to-day it is possible to observe that snatching at experience and particularly at what is regarded as 'pleasurable' experience, which is the hall-mark of the belief in the single span of life. This snatching is symptomatic of the fear that death will come to the snatcher before he has had time to see, hear and feel all that the world has to offer. But as the belief in re-birth is incompatible with the European view of age as a condition to be dreaded, the spectacle of the elderly pursuing pleasure for pleasure's sake must to the more thoughtful Hindu, be not so much shocking as wholly incredible.

I do not believe that anybody born in Hinduism

can imagine what it must mean in terms of individual suffering in the countries of the West when a child or young person is untimely cut off by death. The suffering is of course not merely because the child has been lost to those who love him, but because it is felt that he has failed to experience any of the joys of adult life and that he never will.

Then again, in the absence of the recognition of the laws of cause and effect which Hinduism knows as karma, everything that happens appears to be accidental. 'This makes sorrow almost unbearable. The word 'why' is for ever on the lips of the dweller in Christendom. 'Why should I have been born into poverty?'—'Why should I have been born with an equipment which I feel to be capable of leading me to greatness, yet be unable to find a mean of expressing myself?'—'Why should I have been born a cripple?' 'or blind?' or deaf?' Is Helen Keller, for instance, never to see the world, or hear its sounds? There are said to be over five thousand men and women in England alone who are without sight and hearing! What of them? Why are they doomed to be of the company that is known as the children of the silent night? Why should enormous numbers of people be killed on the roads? Why, in fact, should we be alive at all?

We are told that there is a British ex-officer who has been lying in the Star and Garter Home at Richmond near London ever since the First World War and who has all these years been unable to communicate with his fellow beings except by means of a movement of the

eyelids. Meanwhile, he no doubt believes that this will be the only life on this earth that he will know.

One of the most tragic examples I can point to of someone overcome by evil because there was no one to tell him that he might be re-born on this earth as a whole man, is the French artist of the end of the nineteenth century, Henri de Toulouse Lautrec. His story is one of the most sensationally terrible of any that have come the way of the present generation in that he was born to great possessions yet was unable to enjoy them and that being of outstanding talent he prostituted it in despair. But the Western world is full of Lautrecs, that is to say of individuals who have suffered bodily disaster and who believe themselves to have only one life on this earth.

It would be absurd if it were not pitiful to think that intelligent people can accept such a reasonless view of life, but these are the days when everyone above a certain level of education is asking for scientific proof. In the middle of last century the Western world was given its scientific proof by Charles Darwin, who told it for the first time that Man was the summation of all the forms of life on this earth. A great part of the West was unwilling to give credence to this, to them epoch-making idea, but it is only necessary for anyone who is looking for the truth of the matter to betake himself to some anatomical museum where he can see an embryonic chart, for that will tell him in unmistakable and graphic form how each of us goes through the entire gamut of living beings in the period of gestation in our mothers' womb.

To my mind, however, the incontrovertible argument in favour of re-birth is that if Man, or any sentient creature, were to find himself on this earth as a thinking being *for the first time*, he would at once go mad with horror. The only thing surely that prevents such a state of things is that we have every one of us been with this earth, and of it, since its inception. Hinduism goes so far as to say indeed that the only valid arguments against this theory are those brought by the *ego*, that is to say, the temporary part of eternal Man, which is afraid of its own destruction.

Christendom, shut within the borders of its limited metaphysic, has never possessed a logical outlook on the hereafter, so that when the Christian is confronted with what he is pleased to call the 'theory' of re-birth, the first thing he does after uttering a cry of dismay at the idea of being born on this earth again, is to try to destroy its logic.

The Hindu, meanwhile, is incapable of realising the full splendour of his spiritual heritage *unless* he is able to imagine what it must be like to think of the life of the individual on this earth as being bounded by a single experience of birth and death. It is not in fact until the human being is able to perceive the universe and the things about him as manifestations of the One which have come to the shapes he can apprehend by means of one, or some, or all of the five senses in countless aeons of time, that he is on his way to recognising the limitations attendant on the supposition that Man can arrive at such an apprehension in the course of a single

and partial experience of spiritual awakening stretching over a period of at most a mere seventy years or so. Whether that experience shall have taken place on the surface of this earth or no, is surely immaterial and only the attachments of love would have it thus. Nevertheless, and this cannot be discounted, the Hindu view is that each individual 'soul' returns here many times until it attains at last to oneness with the Absolute.

Little attention would seem to have been paid to the *aesthetics* of religion as they militate against religious feeling in the aesthetically-developed human being, yet there can be few amongst this group who are not alienated by debased types of architecture, the oleograph, or the musically-degraded hymn : while more subtle forms of incompatibility are brought into play by the innumerable paintings and musical compositions, often technically very skilfully produced, which fall within the category of the merely sentimental.

But quite as, if not more deleterious than the output of the visual and other arts, is a vast amount of writing on religious subjects, especially when of the kind that invites admiration for the 'great' figures of the particular faith concerned. Here one is on the edge both of aesthetics—for the quality of the writing is necessarily in question—and of moral integrity, which last becomes an issue the moment the praise of 'virtue' is involved.

It may be argued that there is room for every grade of emotional and intellectual response in a world where no two human beings ever have been, are, or will be, precisely alike. But this admission does nothing towards ameliorating the effect on the individual of those positive forms of expression which are distasteful to him.

Within the realms of pure aesthetics the resultant revolt becomes the subject of more or less acrimonious and relieving criticism, but where religion also enters in, the critical faculty is almost always suppressed in deference to the fear of being guilty of irreverence, or in the more extreme cases, blasphemy.

This is to speak of what may be termed the 'domestic' response. Repulsion in the case of alien religious forms is looked upon as reasonable, if not positively virtuous. It is this preoccupation with their *forms* which confines all religions to a greater or lesser degree within the bounds of racialism, and so transforms the only unifier known to mankind into an instrument of division.

Attraction and repulsion, whether within or without the realms of aesthetics, are far from being matters of *will*, but unthinking man invariably behaves as though they are and sets most vigorously about the business of punishing those who cannot pretend to feelings they do not possess. How great an effect such insincerities have had and are having upon the individual and through him on mankind, can by no means be assessed, but it is plainly to be seen that spontaneity and

INDIA WITHOUT SENTIMENT

ease of mind where religious questions are concerned, is of the first and not the last importance.

I hope I have said enough to prove to my readers that Hinduism is unique in its tolerance and power for good. My final words are therefore a plea for the retention in the India of our day of a language that will enable Hinduism in all the grandeur and completeness of its metaphysical knowledge to be introduced to a Christendom that is in danger of plunging headlong to destruction through lack of spiritual awareness.

The Christendom of to-day includes the greater part of Europe, that part of the Soviet Union that used to be called Russia in Europe, the whole of the Americas, the majority of those countries that comprise the British Commonwealth of Nations, as well as a large number of communities within the political boundaries of countries which profess other faiths.

